



Heinz Tschachler,
Maureen Devine, Michael Draxlbauer (Eds.)

The EmBodyment of American Culture



AAAS Austrian Association for American Studies
Österreichische Gesellschaft für Amerikastudien

American Studies in Austria

LIT

Heinz Tschachler, Maureen Devine,
Michael Draxlbauer (Eds.)

The EmBodyment of American Culture

This One



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edited by

Prof. Dr. Astrid Fellner

(University of Vienna)

Prof. Dr. Klaus Rieser

(University of Graz)

Prof. Dr. Hanna Wallinger

(University of Salzburg)

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Introduction

Heinz Tschachler

The present volume contains a selection of papers that were originally given at the 28th annual conference of the Austrian Association for American Studies (AAAS), October 26-28, 2001, at the University of Klagenfurt, Austria. The conference theme, which was broadly defined as "The EmBodyment of American Culture", originated from the organizers' conviction that American culture has literally become fixated on the body at the same time that the body has emerged as a key term within critical and cultural theory. The fixation on the body is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that for more than a year the United States of America was much more interested in its president's body than in his politics, let alone in the body politic. In contemporary intellectual debates the body is generally looked at as a symbol displaying and revealing hidden 'truths' about the individual and his or her behavior. The horrifying events of September 11, 2001 added a totally unexpected dimension to our original understanding of the conference theme. Following Jessica Johnston, we had taken the term "embodiment" to mean "to represent in bodily or material form. To deprive of abstractness, to give tangible or discernible form to. To make part of a system or whole; to incorporate." (*The American Body in Context* 321.) In the wake of 09/11, the status of the body shifted fundamentally, from a locus of wholeness and presence towards a figure of crisis and fragmentation. The following thoughts by the American linguist George Lakoff are a good example both of the extent to which 09/11 fundamentally changed the world and of the semantic shift of the term "embodiment":

The World Trade Center was a potent symbol, tied into our understanding of our country and ourselves in a myriad of ways. All of what we know is physically embodied in our brains. To incorporate the new knowledge requires a physical change in the synapses of our brains, a physical reshaping of our neural system. The physical violence was not only in New York and Washington. Physical changes — violent ones — have been made to the brains of all Americans.¹

All of us from the Austrian Association for American Studies (AAAS) were deeply affected by a grief and sense of shock over the attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C., and by the tragedy in southwestern Pennsylvania. And all of us struggled to deal with the enormity of the crisis, which also led us towards recognition of the awful vulnerability of our civilization and, concomitantly, of the human body. Also in response to the terrorist attacks, many words of support and solidarity were exchanged between representatives of various American Studies organizations world wide. George Sanchez, who was then President of the American Studies Association (ASA), called upon his respondents to find a civic voice and to engage multiple publics from around the world in a dialogue of openness and respect for others.² Philip J. Deloria from the Department of History at the University of Michigan, who was one of our designated keynote speakers, did not finally come. In a public statement that was read out to conference participants, Professor Deloria explained his reasons, which were all related to the acts of terror committed to the U.S. on September 11, 2001. The editors have permission to reproduce his statement here:

To my colleagues in the Austrian Association for American Studies:

My engagements with global American studies scholars, in Finland and Japan, have been among the most rewarding of my career. I was very much looking forward to the personal and intellectual exchanges that would no doubt have characterized this meeting of the AAAS. The events of September 11th, however, have deeply affected myself and my family, and the probability of further waves of terrorism, suggested not just by the American government, but by intelligence agencies in a number of other nations, have led me — reluctantly — to decide against traveling to Europe at this moment in time. My hesitation stems not so much from fears associated with flying or from the thought of an incident in Austria itself as from the frequently and strongly expressed anxieties and concerns of my parents and my children. Their worries are important to me, so much so that I feel it my first obligation to reassure them in as serious and substantial a way as possible. Like you, I look forward to a different day, when fear and terror have a less powerful grip on all our lives. Please accept my deepest apologies and my very best wishes for a successful conference.

Phil Deloria,

October 21, 2001

The conference was devoted to looking closely at the position of the human body both as a site of aesthetic realization and as a physical presence in American culture, as well as to taking stock of the status which the body has held in recent theoretical discourses. While common sense may still view the body as a natural biological unity, when looked at as a cultural object, the body appears to be subject to an enormous range of interventions, interrogations, and interpretations. French feminism of the 1970s undoubtedly changed the theoretical climate in a wide range of disciplines in the period to follow. Especially in the fields of literary criticism, cultural studies and gender studies, the mediated or representational body has dominated theoretical discourses for the last two decades. Judith Butler in her influential book *Bodies That Matter* has looked at the body as a historical phenomenon that is not so much the effect of constructing social identity as it is the material basis for and the site of formations of identity. In another influential study by Susan Bordo we are alerted to the long historical continuity of constructions of the body as something apart from the true self (*Unbearable Weight* 5). Yet Bordo also demonstrates that there is no such thing as the dissolution of this dualism. On the contrary, the more recent obsession with the body is truly not identical with accepting the body, let alone of humans becoming body-loving (*Unbearable Weight* 15).

The very postmodern imagination of the body as malleable plastic, to be shaped to the meanings we choose is, then, less a celebration of the body than, in Susan Bordo's words, a very concrete "effacement of the body's materiality" (*Unbearable Weight* 38) — whether through plastic surgery, sex-change operations, tattooing, weight-training, or dieting. Thus not only girls and women but, increasingly, men and boys as well, are subject to a complexly and densely institutionalized system of values and practices within which they all come to believe that they are nothing, or treated as nothing, unless they are "trim, tight, lineless, bulgeless, and sagless" (*Unbearable Weight* 32). Among the questions put forward by Susan Bordo are, What are the normalizing disciplines that affect those who conceptualize themselves as overweight? and, How do American women and men conceptualize themselves and their bodies as they attempt to transform their bodies into ideals of health and fitness? Clearly in this shape the body is no longer "located on the nature side of a culture/nature divide" (*Unbearable Weight* 33). Especially the muscled male body is a case in point here insofar as it no

longer suggests uncultured or uncivilized (thus "Nature", as in Marlon Brando's legendary role of Stanley Kowalski), but has become a cultural icon.

We might say, then, that through a major transformation that reimagines the body as a historical and not merely as a biological arena the body has finally taken up residence within culture. Yet if today bodies are cultural forms, the question is, in what ways? To repeat an argument developed by Susan Bordo, culture has both a direct grip and a representational influence on our bodies, the former through the practices and habits of everyday life, from table-manners to toilet-habits, the latter in terms of how the body is represented in various cultural texts, in the arts, in philosophy, religion, medicine, etc. This is not to claim that the body is a *tabula rasa*, merely awaiting inscription of culture. Such a claim would indeed lead towards treating the body as pure text. Some might in fact like the idea of giving free reign to "meaning." Others have, however, warned against "de-corporealizing the subject" or, furthermore, against "suppressing the body." Caroline Bynum has been among those exploring the paradoxical effect of reducing the body to yet another discourse, of dissolving it into language and, in doing so, ignoring the body that eats, that works, that dies, that is afraid — and thus to dislocate the body from history, social practice, and culture. In her attempt towards reconstructing the category of the body, Bynum has also drawn attention to the preservation, in a variety of theoretical discourses, of a traditional Western dualist perspective that sees body and mind in opposition to each other.

While Caroline Bynum has found that medieval philosophers thought of the person as both body and soul, others have shown a keen interest in how the body encounters place, or in the meaning of being in place in the environment.³ And medical research has shown that the neuronal apparatus responsible for our memory is replete with "somatic markers" recording what we have experienced. Perhaps it would be best, then, to theorize the body in terms of uncertainty. This could mean to situate the body at the intersection of culture and biology, to posit that the body is always necessarily touched by culture, while there is of course no denying the role of biology. To think in such a way might even point a way towards breaking up the binary opposition between nature and culture. Yet is it at all possible to mediate between culture and biology, between non-essentialist and essentialist approaches, that is, between those that describe the body as produced through certain discourses, and

those that describe it as a natural biological unity? Whatever the answer may be, the widespread attention the body has attracted calls for a sharpening of our awareness as American Studies scholars of the many instantiations of the body in American culture.

Clearly within American Studies, the mediated or representational body has attracted attention not only in relation to former President Clinton's private, or rather public, parts, which he had to act out on the media stage as part of the Clinton, Monica Lewinsky and Kenneth Starr triangulation.⁴ For instance at the Klagenfurt conference of the Austrian Association for American Studies, Philip J. Deloria was going to show how his own grandfather, Vine Deloria Sr., "always understood that his power was of his body." Such an understanding, we were to be told, was "not simply a reflection of his athletic skills; rather it included a recognition of the ways that he himself embodied the virtues (and, as it turns out the difficulties) of Indian-white social and cultural contact." By the same token, Vine's sister, Ella, situated herself in the world by "placing other people in a kinship pattern and then embodying a series of behaviors." All these relations were of course defined through language and bodily performance in a way that was "particularly Dakota". Yet both Ella and Vine were, "at least for a while, Indians in the city." Thus their stories, Philip J. Deloria suggests, "give us the occasion to consider the ways we have framed issues of cultural contact, and the formation and performance of identities in cross-cultural situations that speak not only to their specific case studies, but also to larger questions about culture, power, and change in America."⁶

Jessica Johnston, too, conceptualizes the body as a major site of social struggle in contemporary American culture, a struggle that, as she writes in her contribution to this volume, clearly reflects "hegemonic power relations and cultural tensions." Consumer culture in particular can be seen as "a vehicle of social control as individuals come to voluntarily discipline themselves to be more in line with its mandates." Thus what needs to be looked at closely are "not only representations and images of the body, but also the ways these representations affect social interaction and social relationships as individuals both accommodate and resist regulation of their bodies." This is to say that Marilyn Monroe might have to look for a different job today, while a look into *Ebony* magazine reveals African American women who are obviously 'heavier' than women 'used' for a 'white' market. The figures are staggering: between 1943 and 1960 a woman's 'ideal'

weight came down from 130 lbs. to 123 lbs., at the same time that the ideal weight of a man of the same size went from 140 lbs. to 134 lbs. A recent poll revealed that 35 percent of adult Americans are in some way trying to lose weight, yet 90 to 95 percent of those attempting to lose weight are unsuccessful at keeping that lost weight off for over five years. In 1990, the market volume for dieting was in the range of \$33 billion. Combined, these statistics reveal a brutal dynamic as people continually strive, unsuccessfully, to reshape and remold their bodies into socially and personally acceptable states. The insights that Jessica Johnston derives from her analysis of the specific ways that women use to negotiate and reproduce, to accommodate and to resist contemporary hegemonic discourses on the body are chilling: overweight individuals come to voluntarily discipline themselves in order to be more in line with dominant cultural mandates as they live their lives in a continual state of embodied dissatisfaction.

Overall, the organizers encouraged interdisciplinary contributions from different fields, such as literary and cultural studies, film and media studies, history and sociology, and women studies. Accordingly, the contributions to the present volume deal with representations and discoursifications of the body in a broad array of texts, in literature, the visual arts, theater, the performing arts, film and mass media, science and technology, as well as in various cultural practices. As regards the contributions that fall into the media's construction of the body, they teach us, for instance through the persuasiveness of advertising, to read bodies as symbols displaying and revealing hidden 'truths' about the individual and his or her behavior. Other papers analyze the body as a symbol and metaphor, in poetry as well as in fiction and film, discussing how it has the power to define and influence the characteristics of gender, race, age, and education attributed to certain bodies. Yet another group explores the various forms of discipline, whether with or without technological intervention, as they bear down on the body. Finally, there are papers that focus on individuals' acts of resistance to, and negotiation with, disciplinary measures. Individuals after all do assert their own interpretations of the body, interpretations that are often in opposition to the hegemonic ways of thinking and knowing the body. If they are, that is, as resistance may well be simply an elusive concept that allows us to assume that we have a measure of 'freedom.' After all, how does one think beyond the cultural knowledge structures we are born into? In other words, now that we know about the cultural

determinations of the body, now that we have explored the various social mechanisms through which the body is conceptualized and disciplined, what is it that we can or should do about them?

Difficult as it may be, the editors have decided to allow the papers collected in this volume to fall into two broad categories, which we called cultural studies and textual studies. This division reflects the standard practice within European American Studies, located as they customarily are within English departments.⁷ The order within each category roughly reflects the degree of theorizing of individual contributions. Textual studies contributions are typically concerned with questions of structure, or with relations of form, theme, and meaning, including verbal play or the defamiliarization of ordinary language. They are concerned with individual works as well as with relations of these to other works or texts. Furthermore, textual studies contributions are concerned with aspects of authorship, genres, media, social and/or cultural movements, even of nationality. Cultural studies contributions are more interested in the 'larger issues,' for instance in the themes or discourses circulating within a culture. They are thus interested in the particular ways of saying and seeing, or else in the values, meanings and assumptions that are projected onto, incorporated into, and (re-)negotiated in cultural manifestations. Cultural studies contributions also typically emphasize 'differences' (cultural, social, etc.), and thus also the question of power, of those who have power and those who do not. This question entails issues of class, race, ethnicity, and gender, and it involves a challenge to the traditional division of high and low (or popular) culture.

In contributions which fall under the category of cultural studies the body is frequently treated as cultural behavior and/or practice. For instance, in Jessica Johnston's "Normalizing Disciplines: Overweight Subjectivities and Resistance," which has been introduced, the body is looked at as a site of social struggle, a vehicle of social control. Other contributions, such as the ones by Anna Schober and Klaus D. Heissenberger, are more interested in how social and cultural values are represented in bodily or material form. In view of what has already been said about the status of the body in contemporary American culture, we may boldly think of the body as "America's last frontier." To do so would invoke, *inter alia*, the revival of various body arts, such as piercing, tattooing, scarification, branding, and body hair removal (the subject of Sarah Hildebrandt's contribution), all of which turn the

human skin into a canvas of aesthetic expression. Other manifestations of physicality range from the culture of fitness (addressed by Jan Jagodzinski), the interest in dressing up, down, and cross, and the subject of blue jeans in Anna Schober's article), the concern over weight (with corollaries such as plastic surgery, cosmetic surgery, and body sculpturing - all subjects dealt with in this volume by Jessica Johnston, Greta Olson, and Louis J. Kern).

Specifically, Louis J. Kern examines the phenomena of genital cosmetic surgery and aesthetic reconstruction in the form of foreskin restoration and laser vaginal rejuvenation. Both phenomena, he argues, are a "response to body-image discontent and self-perceived genital deficit which, in its pathological form, has been identified by psychiatry as Body Dysmorphic Disorder." Practices such as foreskin restoration and laser vaginal rejuvenation have become popular insofar as they "hold out to the alienated and the discontent the promise of bodily perfection." Paradoxically, however, that perfection "resides in a rejection of the natural body, in an increasingly mechanized, technologized, and standardized paradigm of beauty." Ultimately, therefore, genital aesthetic modification "tends finally to the transubstantiation of the organic body to a seamless plastic body [...] the iconic body of Barbie."

Sarah Hildebrandt discusses the growing imperative that (white) Americans be virtually hairless. To be sure, the removal of leg and underarm hair has been a relatively established norm in the United States since the middle of the twentieth century. But contemporary practices go well beyond them and, also of significance, body hair removal is "increasingly the domain of men as well as [of] women. While women remove the hair from legs, underarms, and pubic area, growing numbers of men are removing the hair from their chests and backs." Thus Sarah Hildebrandt's paper emphasizes the implications of hairlessness for our cultural constructions of "public" and "private." What is being "mapped on the body" is twofold, firstly a significant relationship between body hair removal and the public display of the body and, secondly, an increased surveillance and self-surveillance of the body. Jan Jagodzinski has divided his contribution into two parts. In the first part he argues that the female bodybuilder, through her performativity which deconstructs the binary masculine/ feminine by their body "drag," poses a "threat to both heterosexuality and patriarchy". In response to this threat there have emerged certain

"containment" strategies, which attempt to "police this body back into dominant accepted norms of femininity." In the second part of his contribution, jagodzinski attempts to show the "radicality of the female bodybuilder in relation to other bodies that circulate in postmodernity; namely the model-mannequin, the anorexic and the bulimic." The relation may be radical but, with the help of a "Greimasian square", jagodzinski shows how all these bodies relate to one another "through a discursive semiotic logic."

For Anna Schober, blue jeans are by no means an unalterable material object world, but are rather inseparable from the question about what they do and what is done with them. In other words, Schober sees blue jeans as something which is graspable "only as alteration — an alteration which involves ideology, mythos and/or utopia." Accordingly Schober devotes her intellectual labor to showing the involvement of blue jeans in processes which transform the ways of perception "into something that also involves phantasmapoetic processes of fetish-becoming." Schober's explanation of the production of meanings in different social contexts illustrates how meaning depends on changes in contexts and appreciations of a particular object. Ultimately, therefore, the issues of "taste" and "quality", i.e., the question of where to draw the line between good and bad, high and low, the ugly and the beautiful, the superficial and the substantial — emerge in this way as a "quite explicitly political problem."

The argument that the body is a site on which cultural meanings are inscribed is a crucial one for Klaus D. Heissenberger's reading of the various identities rock singer Bruce Springsteen has assumed in the course of his career. These identities reach from an alienated angry young man in the early 1970s to a mature folk poet of the American underclass in the mid-1990s. But it was in the visual representations of the persona Springsteen put on display in the shows of the *Born in the U.S.A.* tour and in videos that were circulated in MTV that the singer's body was most powerfully present. What Heissenberger looks closely at is the politics that made Springsteen's "sweating, tanned, and muscular body" a major force in the production of the singer as a genuinely "American" pop icon. Heissenberger concludes that these politics of the body "were highly ambiguous." In attempts to capitalize on Springsteens popularity, both critics of the Reagan administration and conservatives sought to determine the political meanings of

Springsteen's working-class masculinity and, through it, his Americanness.

Greta Olson examines literary texts about eating disorders in which appetite, the body, and food are depicted as demonic. "Food appears to devour the speaker or force her to eat in a form of reversed cannibalism; the body appears as a demonic and aggressive pursuer." Using the example of Heather Stephanson's poem "Howl" on food abuse, self-cutting, and beauty rituals, Olson demonstrates how eating disorders reveal class, race, and gender problems in the United States. It is not only that weight is a class marker but that "class is also in no small part synonymous with race in the United States". Additionally, we learn that "standards for what constitutes attractiveness affects women particularly, as women are discriminated against more than men for being 'fat.'" Thus problems eating-disordered women have represent "exaggerated versions of anxieties" that many American women suffer from. Thus also the recurrent images in texts on eating disorders are, Olson claims, images of a "culture that through endless reinforcement makes many women sick."

The editors have considered Greta Olson's contribution as transitional, insofar as the topic is explored both from a literary and from a cultural studies perspective. The same could perhaps be said about Monika Seidl's study of the portrait as a strategy to stabilize the body of a woman in terms of "solidity." However, the method she employs — relating one work to another work — has made us see her contribution rather in terms of textual studies. Astrid Fellner's approach is similar, seeing as she does Djuna Barnes's literary texts together with the self-stylized representation of Barnes's body. Other contributions apply to the body questions of structure, or of form, theme, and meaning. One example is Piotr Zazula's contribution, which is about the female body as a theme in selected modernist poems. Another one is Martina Antretter's study of ecopoetry, which shows the human body as problematic or even contested. Finally under the category of textual studies there are contributions (by Dieter Gross and Bernd Herzogenrath) in which the body is treated as a presence on images such as film, photography, and performance art. In all these instances, however, the body is at the center of identity formation, its function being that of a sign that agents use as if they write with and read it and, in doing so, hold it under control.

Specifically, Monika Seidl's analysis focuses "on the various ways in which the body of a woman is mediated in terms of 'solidity' around 1900." One such strategy is to stabilize the body as a portrait. For instance, in Henry James's novel *Portrait of a Lady*, frames and other spatial positions point towards the heroine's, Isabel Archer's, unstable identity which can be only temporarily fixed and stabilized in terms of a "portrait of a lady." Boldly establishing a transatlantic perspective, Seidl relates *Portrait of a Lady* to framing strategies found in fin-de-siècle portraits of women, such as in portraits by Gustav Klimt. By seeing together novel and art work, Seidl substantiates her argument that these various framing strategies function as a "last resort to centre a woman in the modern world where centres no longer hold."

Astrid Fellner's contribution is about Djuna Barnes's attempts to escape the claims her body made on her, to gain control of it and to free it from patriarchal constraints. Additionally, Fellner's contribution may be seen as a bold attempt towards revisioning the traditional category of authorship. In the case of Djuna Barnes, "author" becomes a complex configuration of the writer's own body and of other bodies. In order to untangle this complexity, Fellner offers several foci: one is the frequently contradictory views of the female body in Barnes's literary texts; another one is on Barnes's literary texts in connection with the sexually explicit drawings that accompany *The Book of Repulsive Women* and *Ladies Almanack*; a third focus is on the persona of Djuna Barnes, "the lady of fashion," who "penned the *Ladies Almanack* and assumed the reputation of a bohemian cult figure in the American expatriate culture in Paris." Fellner argues that Barnes's literary texts together with her self-stylized representation of her body as a site of signifying practices and a scene of cultural inscription form just one "body." This "body" serves as a locus where the "cultural construction of various, conflicting identities are subverted and transgressed."

Piotr Zazula's contribution deals with the female body as a theme in selected modernist poems, specifically in poems which deal with "interpersonal encounters in the modern city." Such encounters are ordinarily premised on the "social necessity of ignoring the omnipresence of alien individuals," at the same time as it becomes a "source of perpetual psychological tension: though conscious of the often alluring presence of the Other, most urbanites feel obliged to act as if they did not notice other city dwellers." T.S. Eliot's "Rhapsody On a Windy Night", William Carlos Williams's "The Young Housewife",

and Oscar Williams's "The Leg in the Subway" each in its own way "constitutes interpersonal encounters both as a menace and as a promise." Significantly, Zazula demonstrates that these poems may offer "radically different visions of the city's social interactions," yet in all the three poems, the "male speakers view the accidentally encountered *female* bodies as indicative of a *feminine* presence," a presence that "invariably stands for the instinctual and the carnal, permanently allotted to the realm of half-articulated desires."

Martina Antretter in her study of ecopoetry shows the human body as problematic or even contested. The article outlines two directions that nature poetry has recently taken. The first direction is exemplified by Mary Oliver's ecopoetry: shot through as it is with a conscious implementation of metaphors that evoke feminized nature, Oliver's poetry is nevertheless "not a regression so much as it is a potentially liberating act" — as witness the poetic rendering of the mother in nature (which Antretter places within the framework of Hélène Cixous' concept of the mother as the "equivocal") and the underlying eroticism of descriptions of physical immersion in nature. The second direction is exemplified by the ecopoetics of Amy Clampitt, which rather than celebrate nature as a backdrop to physical surrender addresses it as a "fundamentally de-romanticized concept" — a "locus or meeting point between the human and the non-human that possesses new dimensions; ones which, as of yet, defy classification."

Dieter Gross discusses the role of physical or bodily violence during a crucial period in American opera, i.e., during the transition from its first attempts, in the 1930s, at becoming a national art form to the decade in which this end was finally achieved in the music dramas of the 1950s. Violence, Gross argues, is a major factor of American life. It is no surprise, then, that violence already played a major role in the first budding of American opera during the 1930s (Gruenberg, Gershwin), and even more during its maturation in the 1940s (Weill, Blitzstein, Still). This development, based as it is on the conviction that violent conditions or settings could carry operatic potential, peaked in the multi-faceted uses of suffering in the music dramas of the 1950s (Menotti, Robinson, Floyd, Moore, Bernstein, Ward). Additionally, Gross traces a larger pattern in the development from "*exemplary* acts of violence," which are frequently organized around an individual, towards "structural violence," which is crucial to the story line — as origin, as a turning point, or as result.

Bernd Herzogenrath once again offers a wider panorama, showing as he does that from its beginnings onwards, the "Project America" has been closely connected to the body as a stabilizing concept. Specifically, questions of identity have been "posed in corporeal terms," insofar as both Emersonian "self-reliance" and individualism "heavily rely on the strong, whole, autonomous body." It is with and against this ideal body that Herzogenrath attempts a Lacanian reading of the "dismembered body" — both in its physical reality and as a metaphor — the *corps morcelé* in the movie *Freaks*, directed by Tod Browning, one of the early filmmakers notoriously obsessed with bodily dismemberment.

Seen together, the contributions we finally selected are representative of many theoretical positions — hermeneutic, historical, structuralist, feminist, postmodernist — and they are representative of many different fields — literary criticism, cultural studies, media and film studies, and gender studies. Significantly, none of the contributions sees the body as a neutral, or indeed, natural point of reference in critical discussion. Instead, the body is invariably invoked as a contestable signifier in the articulation of identities, which are themselves enacted, negotiated, or subverted through bodily practices. If anything, the body is discussed at one and the same time as a biological entity and as a symbolic artifact, at once created in the world of nature and physically reconstructed by a culture. From this it follows that the body is both an internal, subjective environment as well as an object for others to observe and evaluate. Phrased differently, the body is a biological entity over which we labor insofar as our everyday life of eating, drinking, and sleeping immerses us in a perpetual labor of bodily maintenance. At the same time, these very same bodily practices weave us within a dense web of social relationships.

Even though an impressive range of different papers and lectures was presented at the conference, not everything can be covered in the framework of what is really the annual meeting of a quite small scholarly association. Therefore the editors have decided to include a bibliography, at the end of the volume, collated from contributions and from organizers' work. A final word: The papers collected in the present volume are ample proof that in the United States the return of the body is by no means restricted to an affair of state but is rather a phenomenon of American culture at large. At the same time, the papers we collected are indicative of a truly international American Studies project. Such a

project may now be more important than ever. As we are putting together this Introduction, news and commentaries overflow with texts about the relations between the U.S. and its European allies. These relations can be described in terms of conflict and misunderstanding, and they are the result, it seems, of a failure to understand the complex dynamics of binational or multi-national relations. Additionally, as war against Iraq becomes a stark reality, the bodily dimension of these relations becomes ever more tangible. With this — potentially quite disturbing — dimension of the conference theme we shall take our leave as your editors. Enjoy the book.

Notes

¹ George Lakoff (lakoff@cogsci.berkeley.edu) "Thoughts about the events of September 11," (cogling@ucsd.edu) September 20, 2001.

² George Sanchez, "ASA: Statement on the Events of September 11th," H-AMSTDY@h-net.msu.edu, October 12, 2001.

³ See Arlene Plevin (University of Washington, English Department), with a panel titled "The Body in Place: Literature and the Environment," for PAMLA (Pacific Ancient and Modern Language Association) Conference 2000, Nov. 10-12 at UCLA, Los Angeles, CA.

⁴ See Mario Klarer, "Introduction," *Amerikastudien / American Studies (AmSt)*, special issue, "Body / Art," 44.3(1999) 319-20; and Richard A. Posner, *An Affair of State: The Investigation, Impeachment, and Trial of President Clinton* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1999).

⁵ Philip J. Deloria, "'I am of the Body': Embodiment, Performance and Subjectivity in Indigenous America," unpubl. ms., 2001.

⁶ In his book, *Playing Indian* (1998), Philip J. Deloria looks at white people using their bodies as text which allows them to become "Indian" both in clothing and in imagery, thus "making metaphors for themselves" (60). From members of the Boston Tea Party to members of Hippie communes, from the concerts of the Grateful Dead to the "spiritual quests" of New Agers, then, "[t]he donning of Indian clothes moved ideas from brains to bodies, from the realm of abstraction to the physical world of concrete experience. There, identity was not so much imagined as it was performed, materialized through one's body and through the witness and recognition of others" (184).

⁷ See Rob Pope, *The English Studies Book. An Introduction to Language, Literature and Culture* (London-New York: Routledge, 1998) 44-66.

Normalizing Disciplines: Overweight Subjectivities and Resistances

Jessica Johnston

I: What does it feel like to go on a diet?

Lydia: The first thing I do when I think about starting a diet is I bake a batch of chocolate chip cookies or go out and buy a box of Mrs. Fields cookies. Because I'm angry about denying myself and just the thought of weeks and weeks of denial pisses me off. So what I do, instantly, when I start to think about a diet, which I can understand why there's so much publicity why diets don't work, if I'm thinking about dieting, then I think about how hungry I am all the time. And that's on my mind all the time, how hungry I am. And how I have to fight that hunger. And it becomes a battle. Who's going to win? I lose most of the time. And then there goes the self esteem, further and further away. I do so many other things well. Why can't I do this well too? And so then, what I end up thinking is, that all the things that I do well, are a farce. And that this failure is the real me. Then I say to myself, I shouldn't be eating this. But I deserve it because I had such a shitty day. So I use food to justify filling in the emotional empty spaces. Or the frustration and the anxiety. Disappointments. I turn to food in all those cases. And I think at forty-five too, you start thinking about unfulfilled expectations, um, dreams that never came true. Those kinds of things, like not accepting of where I am, physically, emotionally, my career, just a general dissatisfaction with myself. And then, what I have is a cycle in that I then start getting angry with myself for not breaking it, for not breaking that cycle.

Lydia's tattered self-esteem is reproduced throughout most of my interviews with both men and women who conceptualized their bodies as overweight.¹ In their discussions of themselves and their bodies, they continually articulate brutal internal conflicts and self-esteem issues. Lydia here is both angry and resistant, and oppressed and accommodating. She defiantly bakes or buys cookies when she thinks of dieting. With cookies she assails the probable hunger and deprivation

she will endure. She has to "fight that hunger," a hunger that is both physical and emotional and it becomes, in her words, "a battle." Her use of a battle metaphor reveals her multiple and contradictory selves. In her conquer and surrender analogy, she is defeated by a fragmented self. The hunger and deprivation and denial take their toll. Her anger is turned inward, and into acquiescence and a lowered self esteem. She states, "I lose most of the time." But who is this "I" that loses? Who or what is winning?

Beyond the psychological theorizing about these internal dynamics is a larger cultural discourse that needs to be addressed. What are the cultural resources used by the overweight in their explanation of themselves? What social texts do they use in their judgments? One purpose of this paper is to explore these questions, not through speculative social criticism, or through myopic psychoanalysis, but through an in-depth ethnographic focus on the normalizing disciplines used by the overweight on themselves.

BATTLE METAPHORS

The "battle of the bulge" is a well-known cliché in American culture. Many of the overweight I interviewed use the words "battle," "struggle" and "fight" when they discussed their efforts to transform their bodies. Their bodies became embodied battle sites as they fought with fragmented and multi-sided selves. Their internal voices urged them to sacrifice and "win," or negotiate a "surrender." No truce or peace though is ever accomplished, no treaty or compromise is ever reached. The battle only reverses direction as invalidated strategies are exposed on their naked bodies.

The battle identified by Lydia is reproduced by 59.9 million adult Americans currently attempting to transform their bodies. This intimate battle for self-control illustrates the power of hegemony articulated by Antonio Gramsci. The individual's motivations and guidelines are integral to the elusive and relatively invisible power of social control under capitalism. Social control is embedded "inside" the individual, personalized as "self-control" as individuals monitor and judge their bodies and their behaviors in accordance with cultural criteria. Physical coercions no longer have to be applied as individuals "beat" themselves, "fight" themselves, "threaten" themselves, and attempt to manipulate themselves voluntarily.

Institutional frameworks establish the criteria with which individuals come to rule themselves. The "knowledge" with which individuals come to perceive and evaluate their behavior, the resources with which they come to reinterpret their actions, the information with which they come ultimately to manage themselves, are effective in keeping the individual focused on themselves and thus less critical of the social structure.² The perception of the overweight individual as "the problem," as dysfunctional, directs the overweight towards individualized remedies and non-disruptive solutions. When the individual fails at resolving "his" or "her" problem, responsibility is again attributed to the specific individual, disregarding the 59.9 million of individuals who "fail" in unison. As Lydia said, "I lose most of the time."

The other half of Lydia's fragmented self within the battle analogy asserts itself through commodification. Lydia resists through baking or buying cookies. Many of the overweight I interviewed actively communicate their defiance with symbols structured through a consumption economy, creating meaning out of the forms it provides. Food consumption comes to be a form of self-realization, a method of declaring autonomy.³ Revolt for these overweight then comes to be the rearrangement of food as a subversive code, a code that ultimately reveals both the fetishization and displacement of objects produced for the market, and the hierarchically arranged social relations embedded within the production process. The individualized act of practicing resistance through food consumption can be seen as reinforcing the macro-level patterns of domination and subordination. From a structuralist perspective, the phenomenological experience of protest through the language of commodities is also an act of participation in a set of shared symbols and meanings. Lydia reveals her location within a consumption economy by using Mrs. Field's cookies for a seemingly oppositional meaning.⁴

My analysis of the overweight, though, should not suggest that they are social dupes. The analysis of Lydia's commodification of self-assertion, her resistance through cookies should not deny the real, phenomenological sense of rebellion and defiance, the frustration and depression experienced by the overweight in their acts of resistance and moments of self-mastery. Those interviewed articulated critical insights into their own oppression. Their insightful critiques of society are embedded in their discussion of themselves and their life worlds. But

their perceptions and condemnations of the larger structure were usually screened through a vocabulary and language that succeed in reinforcing their subordination. Most individuals within a hegemonic culture find it difficult to translate the outlook implicit in their experiences into a conception of the world that will challenge that hegemonic culture (Lears). If discrepancies between the two are observed, the larger social system is rarely held accountable. Instead, individuals use the language and vocabulary of permissible discourse which, in American culture, focuses on the individual as the problem in need of correction.

But this filter of responsibility does not negate the insights and critiques the interviewees articulated and expressed towards the cultural system. The challenges of the overweight may be re-directed and shunted into other passive and acquiescent forms, but the evaluative judgments are not suppressed.

Don: And of course you have the, what do you call it, Madison Avenue, and the, what the majority, the masses consider attractive, acceptable. Because, granted, I am turned on by somebody who's attractive, who's not three or four hundred pounds, you know. I don't want to ah, you know, particularly date a girl who's three or four hundred pounds. A girl who's enormously overweight I would not find, I would not date.

I: And why is that?

Don: Because it doesn't appeal to me. And of course I try to look on the other side of the track. This girl, would she go out with me because I'm over three or four hundred pounds? Probably not.

I: Can you be proud of yourself at your weight now?

Lydia: No.

I: How come?

Lydia: Well, it came from that "thin is in." I mean if it weren't for the way society looks at me, I wouldn't care that I was 127 instead of 107. I mean, I really don't care. Inside my deep dark self. That I don't. But when I go to put on clothes that are a size nine instead of a five or a seven that I want to wear, I go "I'm so fucking ugly."

Don and Lydia vacillate in their reading of the cultural mandates. "Objectively" they can decode the mandates. Don admits he still is caught up in appearance norms dictated by Madison Avenue. Lydia acknowledges a split between the way society looks at her and what she feels "inside her deep dark self." They understand how much of their own self-rejection is influenced by social appearance norms that invalidate their bodies. Yet the objective awareness and understanding of the source of their rejection does not empower these individuals to counter that rejection. Don understands the bigotry against obesity, while also acknowledging that he too judges, condemns and rejects heavier people. Lydia's twenty pounds is not significant to her, "if it weren't for the way society" perceives her.

So where do these images come from? What are the elusive images used by Don and Lydia in their rejection of themselves? Madison Avenue and the media are continually cited by the people I interviewed. Media icons like Heather Locklear, Meg Ryan, the model Elle McPherson, and the women on the television show *Friends* are identified as sources of both inspiration and resentment. The overweight realize the media have set the ideal standards of attractiveness, and also recognize those images are deceptive and unreal. The overweight I interviewed acknowledge the images that are held up as the ideal, the images that are used to guide people are basically unattainable – and yet those images are still the illusion with which they must negotiate.

The icons used as metaphors of health, style, beauty are unreal, based on ideals that are fabrications of a beauty myth. The beauty industry eliminates from photographed models the perceived imperfections of an illusory ideal by re-touching or air brushing the dark circles or wrinkles around a model's eyes, removing facial blemishes, rashes, even the protruding ribs of too-thin models. But the overweight individuals, in their internal dialogues, use the re-touched icons, these simulations of reality, to fuel their battle with themselves. Their seemingly inner private world is infiltrated by a mediated world of continually happy, thin, economically successful beautiful people. Their subjectivity has been colonized, saturated, populated by unrealistic views. The responses of an authentic self vanish in a simulacrum of beauty image ideals. The structure upon which the illusion is built is also an illusion, perpetually reinforced through consumer demand for "escape" from their daily lives and the problems that generate the supposed bodily imperfections.

It is this toleration and participation in the self-alienating pretense that preserves the status quo and the power of normalizing disciplines inherent in a hegemonic culture. These overweight individuals have internalized the hegemonic struggle, punishing themselves for their failure to acquire the cultural badges of success even as they recognize that those badges are a sham. They have internalized the dominant culture, judging themselves and others even as they see through the pretensions of the standards used in the judgment. In one breath they are condemning societal influences and in the next, they are condemning themselves for being affected by those same pressures. Understanding the elements of social control does not free them from the effects of those elements.⁵ Knowledge, insight, and awareness do not provide freedom.

Their personal turmoil has a broader social significance. It is the perpetuity of their effort, their need to bring this "waywardness" back into line that is the core of Gramsci's concept of hegemony. Individuals continually must be "won back," must be seduced into controlling themselves, managing themselves to meet the needs of the social structure. They council themselves against rebellion, against insubordination, against mutiny. I asked the interviewees what they said to themselves when they wanted to transform their bodies.

Monica (Weight Watcher Lecturer): It's hard. I've been as much as ten pounds over goal. And then I just kind of go, "You can't get up there and tell those people how to lose weight if you're eating your head off." And that generally gets me back, and I get back on program. And I lose the weight. Harry: You're thinking there it is, that it's not good for you. It always stays in the back of your mind what's good for you and what's not good for you.

In counseling themselves against insubordination, these individuals attempt to transform their bodies through bolstering the cultural mandates that, as Harry suggests, are supposedly operating automatically within them. They are attempting to win their own consent. They are discussing with themselves the values, the goals, the rationales for maintaining their discipline. Monica is the epitome of the contested soul, as she councils others on how to lose weight while she is "eating her head off." This realization is, for her, the impetus to keep

herself “under control,” which helps her win her own consent. Harry acknowledges that the voices “always stay in the back of your mind.”

Underlying all these strategies for self control is the issue of behavior control and the attempt to enforce a particular type of behavioral conformity. These individuals are attempting to transform their bodies with corrective techniques that promote obedience, advancing a body that appears to heed the cultural mandates, a body that looks like it complies with the rules and orders and priorities dictated by others.⁶

Self-control is, in this sense, a paradoxical injunction, since obedience becomes compliance rather than self-control.⁷ Conforming to the rules and expectations of others is accomplished by allowing the mandates to function automatically within the self. The only way to actually be “in control” of their bodies is to defy the mandates, to mutiny, to be “out of control.” “What the hell” becomes, in this sense, liberation.

Terry: I'll be sitting there thinking, “No,” you know, “You really shouldn't do that.” But then I think, “Oh, what the hell. Screw it all. I'm going to eat it anyway.”

Mandi: But I ate it. I figured what the hell. Since the diet was coming up soon, but it wasn't there yet, a couple of pounds one way or another doesn't make that much difference.

John: The fact is, I don't want to have to think about it. I think, “Screw you! How dare you tell me I can't have this now.” So I tend to do whatever I want to do and I try to be responsible. But it's an artificial type process. I mean “I really shouldn't do that. No, I'm not going to be good and not do that.” I put all these rules on myself, you know, “Oh, that was good of you.” I give myself a pat on the shoulder and then go reward myself with some Mrs. Field's chocolate chip cookies, you know. (Laughter)

“What the hell,” “What difference does it make?” “I'm going to eat it anyway.” These are refrains, voiced in unison as the overweight rebel and resist the expectations of themselves and others. They question the restrictions imposed upon them and through them. At this interface between the conflicting macro-level injunctions and their seemingly private intimate world, they seek release and a silencing of the multitude of voices screaming for control. That release though is entrapping, the

silence is never heard as the cycle begins again. Their rebellion cannot be unfettered from the reins of the internalized control as they hate themselves for their mutiny. And the “battle” begins again.

As Foucault established, power and pleasure do not cancel each other out (Foucault 1980). The extraordinary efforts that are invested in the hopeless task of eliminating the excess weight, and the unrelenting cycles of weight gain that are generated from those efforts, create the proliferation of targets for the weight control industry rather than the disappearance of bodies that carry excess weight. Institutional supports for both the whetting of appetites and the creation of uncompromisingly thin “ideal” body images that cannot accommodate those appetites, permits the proliferation of institutional power, its multi-faceted tentacles reaching ever more widely, deeply, and thoroughly into the individual. Pleasure and power pursue each other, overlap and reinforce one another. As demonstrated by Jody in the next quote, pleasure and power are linked together by complex, positive mechanisms of excitation and excitement (Foucault 1980, 48).

I: What do you say to yourself?

Jody: “You want to be thin and here you are eating all this food. You’re never going to be thin. You have no self control! You have these images but you take no effort to look like that. You just keep stuffing your face with food!” And I just continue eating. I have these little voices in my head that are screaming at me to stop eating. “It’s too fattening!” But I just continue eating because I like it.

Jody’s words document the complexity of the intimate battle for self control. She articulates the competing discourses between her ideal body image and the pleasure and excitation of consumption, between the multiple pleasures grounding her competing desires. These multiple pleasures and the accompanying discord between her fragmented selves generate a continuing internal dissonance that makes her a prime target for the weight control industry to “fix.” Jody, like most of the overweight I interviewed, sought assistance to help silence the battle between the “little voices screaming to stop eating” and their desire to consume. This assistance could be from medical professionals, weight loss clinics or groups, psychotherapists, and/or pharmaceuticals. According to the people I interviewed, transforming the body through monitoring the

ratios between food consumption input and exercise output is usually complimented by the use of prescribed pharmaceuticals.

Individual drug use is said to be the most distinctive feature of the modern therapeutic state and is the "marvelous irony of modern life" (Waitzkin 151). Self-medication is part of a process whereby individuals, as the troubled agents of society, treat themselves as if they have the problem. In this context it has been said that if organized religion was the opiate of the poor and the oppressed, then today's medicine is the opiate of the sick and the frustrated.⁸ Psychotropically induced tranquility preserves dreams of secularized happiness. It highlights the drive to be in control while out of control, to be calm in a state of crisis, to be alert while deadened.

The metaphor is actualized in the use of drugs for those attempting to transform their bodies – the tranquilizers, the diet pills, the steroids, the anti-depressants – the use of which directs an individual's distressed and frustrated behavior into safe, acceptable, and nondisruptive channels. Through chemically altering their bodies/minds, overweight individuals can starve or animate their bodies while eliminating the experience of hunger or fatigue⁹, or the necessity to confront an oppressive social system. Focusing on themselves and their bodies as the problem, they attempt a self-transformation in order to more closely conform to cultural ideals.

Ron: I'm also on an appetite depressant pill. And those, I don't know if they're, ahhh, if they work or not. But while I'm on the diet, it keeps me thinking about the diet when I'm taking the pill. It might be water pills for all I know. Or sugar, or whatever. So who knows. But they do control me.

Janice: I'm thinking about going you know, back to my diet doctor and getting diet pills. The last couple of times that I have gotten them, um, my, you know, my migraines were really intense. I mean, I know they aggravate them. And I get nauseous, sick to my stomach. And I don't have the money to go back. But I'm, you know, really considering it. Because I'm . . . because it worked. It got me down to where I wanted to be.

Again, as Foucault has illuminated, the power of medical knowledge is to discipline individuals by having them control themselves. Relying on

medical knowledge that is both describing and constructing a "normal" body, the overweight survey their "abnormalities" and self-medicate their bodies into eating less through the use of appetite-depressants or exercising more through the use of steroids or amphetamines. If an "ideal" body is constructed, then those who have trouble realizing that body are supplied with the substances and techniques which will facilitate the struggle towards that objective. These overweight individuals willingly self-medicate themselves and thus attempt to meet cultural standards. They are active in the creation of their own docility. Instead of questioning the standard itself, chemical substances are supplied so individuals can attain those standards. Drugs can be supplied to alter the body so the individual can be calm while in crisis, in control while they are not, alert when they are tired, full when they are hungry, sleepy when they are awake. Xenical, Viagra, and Prozac are all current examples of how the body can now be chemically altered to better meet socially constructed ideals.

These chemical substances, whether diet pills, steroids or anti-depressants, collapse a complex series of political and social questions. As hegemonic forms of social control, the use of drugs depoliticizes the socio-structural issues involved, and mutes the potential for action by individuals to change the conditions that are troubling them. The medicalization of social problems aims toward individual adjustment and mutes potential resistance, as individuals voluntarily medicate themselves, alter themselves to meet unrealistic targets, to transform themselves as the problem in need of correction. The overweight declare in union with Lydia, "I am the problem." These micro-level processes tend to reinforce macro-level patterns of domination and subordination in society. It is a bio-chemical readjustment of the body/mind.

While conventional interpretations of the health profession regard prisons, medicine, and psychotherapy as rational and progressive, Foucault, by contrast, claims that these "advances" do not liberate the body from external control, but rather intensify the means of social regulation. From the prison institutions, to the doctor in the community, to the psychiatrist, to Oprah, to weight loss organizations, mechanisms of social control are highlighted to help individuals learn to monitor their own or others physical and mental well-being. It is these micro-mechanisms of power that play an increasing role in the management of people's lives through direct action on their bodies. They operate not

through a code of law, but through a technology of discipline, not by punishment but by conformity. Social control is not a static set of mechanisms with which individuals are forced to comply, but a dynamic social practice, constantly in process, constantly reproducing itself in the ordinary workings of these institutions. But social control works at this macro-institutional level only because it works similarly at the micro level of the individual, working "automatically" on and through the individual, as Harry suggested above, as they voluntarily work at keeping themselves in line.

Diet pills, steroids, Viagra, Prozac all help individuals chemically sculpture the constructed ideal, further eroding the distinctions between the authentic and the artificial, between the lived experience and the mediated/medicated experience. It is these internalized community standards operating through the individual that generate the seeming invisibility and indirectness of social control. Social control measures that are self-initiated maintain a relatively smooth-functioning social order that supports the hierarchical arrangements. And it is these micro-mechanisms of power, complexly interrelated in the fields of medicine, psychotherapy, and consumer mandates, that play an increasingly important part in the management of overweight people's lives through their direct action on their own bodies.

The management of the overweight body is a prime target for medicine, psychotherapy and consumer mandates to "fix" through individualized voluntary efforts. Assumed is the conceptualization of the body as an object that can be transformed, that can be modified through individual will.

Responsibility for controlling the body through will power is assumed by the overweight. Many of the overweight conceptualized their bodies as inanimate machines, subordinated to their wills/minds. As has been discussed by many cultural theorists, the body/machine metaphor is and has been dominant in western philosophical worldviews. The overweight in fact used the body-as-machine to explain the distinction between "a fine tuned" thin/fit body and being out-of-shape and overweight. The body-as-machine metaphor was replicated each time they described their somatic or psychological states in mechanistic terms: their bodies were "worn out", "wound up", "run down". And reflecting the transformation of the culture from a mechanistic to electronic orientation they also described themselves as "turned off", "tuned it", "charged", and "energized". The machine

metaphor gave their conception of their bodies has having an on-off state, a level of efficiency, a productive capacity, an internal mechanism, a source of energy, and an operating condition, which function as the primary evaluative mechanism. The machine-as-the-standard developed into an aesthetic, a compelling icon, a value towards which they aspired. The technology metaphor had come to define the "good", had constructed what they thought a healthy or "fine-tuned" or "well-running" body, family, group, and society ought to be.

Far from how the body actually performs, the body-as-machine metaphor is also applied when the body "breaks down." Inherent in this rationality of the machine metaphor is the concept of the body as comprised of interchangeable parts. When something goes wrong with the body, the focus is on the malfunctioning body part. If a machine part is old, it can be replaced or upgraded. So too now with body parts: Medicine has perfected kidney transplants, liver transplants, cornea transplants, heart transplants, etc. Which raises the interesting question: If all of a person's body parts were eventually replaced, would that individual still be the same person?

Robert J. White, a medical research scientist, has "successfully" completed a body/head transplant on a monkey – the monkey opened its eyes and responded to external stimuli, though it could not move its arms or legs.¹⁰ White has stated that soon this experiment will lead to a human being able to get out of bed and function as one whole "total" individual. White's work is the epitome of the concept of the body/machine composed of interchangeable parts, with the mind remaining as the definition of the person. The body is exchanged, interchanged, with the identity of the person supposedly unwavering and stable.

What happens though to the "reality" of gender identity if male and female bodies are switched? What happens to the reality of race in American society if an African-American head can be transplanted onto a white body? The collapse of these seemingly stable boundary markers leads to questions surrounding the distinctions upholding mind/body dualisms, and gender and race signifiers. What are the criteria for normalizing disciplines when gender and racial boundaries become blurred, when the body is no longer a stable entity?

Dr. White's experiment highlights the growing sense of a malleable embodied identity, illustrating the erosion of distinction between embodied existence and its transcendence. As Susan Bordo suggests,

[g]radually and surely, a technology that was first aimed at the replacement of malfunctioning parts has generated an industry and an ideology fuelled by fantasies of rearranging, transforming, and correcting, an ideology of limitless improvement and change, defying the historicity, the mortality and indeed, the very materiality of the body. In place of that materiality, we now have what I will call cultural plastic. In place of God the watchmaker, we now have ourselves, the master sculptors of that plastic (245-46).

Collapsing the distinction between authentic and the artificial, the human body is decentered as transcendence becomes highlighted. This kind of transcendence challenges the stability of human identity as located in the body. This type of transcendence also suggests a form of perpetual self-rebirth, a re-birth that becomes the site of cultural anxieties and social disruptions.

Computer-mediated communication is one site where these boundary transgressing problems are currently emerging. The body, its absence, or its virtual malleability, is central to contemporary notions of cyberspace. It is the ability to interact with others, not as a physical presence, but as an "essence" crossing temporal, geographic, spatial, and visual boundaries, that is one of the defining characteristics of computer-mediated communication. Identity is supposedly performed independently of fixed bodily attributes because the physical body no longer limits who one is or can be, or where the image can be seen. Individuals are able to (re)present themselves as young or old, male or female, attractive or ugly, abled or disabled, of any color or size, in any part of the world.

The boundaries between the fictive and the real, the biological and the symbolic, and the produced and the reproduced become blurred. Computer-mediated communications illustrate that all understandings of the body are mediated through representations which are constructed through interpretative frameworks. The collapse of the real blurs the boundaries and illustrates that appearance is malleable and unreliable, that displayed images are able to be virtually manipulated.

By losing the concreteness of the physical body and its connection to supposed naturalness and the taken-for-granted givenness of real-life bodies, the assumptions guiding Western conceptualizations can be challenged as the definition of the person. The infamous *New Yorker*

cartoon, "On the internet, nobody knows you are a dog," succinctly encapsulates this challenge to unembodied presences. My latest research with self-described overweight individuals suggests that their use of computer mediated communication allows them this freedom, this ungrounding from a deviant bodily identity. In some ways their disembodied experiences on the computer release them from isolation and discrimination. Being on-line allows them the freedom to assume various embodied identities.

Significantly though, new ethnographic research is suggesting that much of the potential for on-line communication to challenge conventional interpretation is not realized as interactions are geared toward "re-connecting and re-fixing bodies and identities" (Slater 92). For instance, individuals and online communities put their photos on web sites, or people who meet in chat rooms exchange electronic images of themselves. As "real world" references, people on-line also seek each other out to meet in real life, either individually or in groups. In this sense the people I interviewed remain trapped in the narratives surrounding excess weight. While people may form bonds through disembodied interaction in cyberspace, the concreteness of the body is still sought. Bodily attributes such as gender markers and size are still perceived as stable identifiers. The markers are used to anchor the disembodied voice, the "real" body perceived as manifesting the outcome of the battle between temptations, sensations, indulgences, and the mind's control of rational thought. Computer-mediated communications, even as they challenge the boundary markers of reality, even as they allow individuals to play with signifiers and metaphors, also illuminate our desire to ground the body in its physical essentialism. At the beginning of the 21st century, the hegemonic distinctions and metaphors are still being reproduced despite the challenges that have been made to those constructs. The general tyranny of normalizing disciplines, the pressures on American men and women to transform their bodies to meet culturally sanctioned unrealizable ideals, is perpetually replicated in their daily interactions as they both yearn for and reject, both virtually manipulate and confront images of who they are.

Notes

¹ The interviews have been conducted periodically over the last ten years with twenty middle class American men and woman who describe themselves as "overweight." The interviews are part of a long-range investigation of weight consciousness in American culture. I recognize gender as an important determinant within normalizing disciplines, as many theorists have documented. (See Susan Bordo in her book *Unbearable Weight*.) While not ignoring gender as a factor, this analysis will focus on mechanisms cited by both men and women in their attempts to transform their bodies.

² See Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment*, Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony", and O'Neill, *Five Bodies*.

³ See Brumberg, *Fasting Girls*.

⁴ The labeling of these overweights' assertions of autonomy as "oppositional" draws upon John Fisk's definition. Eating two candy bars is phenomenologically an act of resistance, an act that puts them in *their own experience* as in "direct opposition to the dominant ideology." Within the context of this specific moment they are defying cultural mandates. That this resistance is co-opted is not phenomenologically significant.

⁵ Similar results were found in the study of class consciousness in Sennett's *The Hidden Injuries of Class*. Sennett's respondents deemed their class inferiority a sign of personal failure, even as many realized they had been constrained by class origins which they could not control.

⁶ See Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment* and Freund, *The Civilized Body*.

⁷ See Stein, *The Psychoanthropology of American Culture*.

⁸ See Logan and Hunt 139.

⁹ See O'Neill, *Five Bodies* 151.

¹⁰ See "Frankenstein Fears after Head Transplant." BBC. 6 April 2000. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/1263758.stm>>

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Venus Envy – Penis Envy: Aesthetic Autoplasty, Genital Reconstruction, and Erotic Embodiment

Louis J. Kern

Descendant from a modern medical sub-specialization that evolved in response to congenital and acquired physical deformities and the ravages of epidemic venereal disease, postmodern plastic surgery occupies a liminal space in a culture of corporeal commodification that mediates the transition between the body's interior and its surface, between the biological and the culturally constructed, between psychological and physical embodiment. Increasingly understood as aesthetic rather than reconstructive, plastic surgery responds to the body as personal and public object of perception and as the site of transformative identity and incorporated desire. Contemporary psychotherapeutics has recognized a binary discursive disjuncture between body image and body ego, and has postulated a pathological Cartesian corpus that forms an "essential component of the self-concept."¹ Since 1994, its most obsessive form has been identified as "dysmorphobia" or, in clinical terms, "Body Dysmorphic Disorder," a category of "inferiority complex" that is diagnostically characterized by "cultural concerns about physical appearance and the importance of proper self-presentation [that] may influence or amplify preoccupation about an imagined physical deformity."²

But Freud had emphasized as early as the 1920s that the ego is "first and foremost a bodily ego,"³ thereby normativizing some degree of somatic dysmorphia that is not clinically observable as pathologically obsessive/compulsive and manifested in physical and/or social impairment. Contemporary psychiatric theory recognizes moderate bodily disgust and preoccupation with physical defects as essential components of personal identity and self-image under such terms as the "bodily self," the "somatic self," and "body image."⁴ The postmodern body is a fragmented congeries of "body-ego deficits," a "skin ego" vexed by unfulfilled desire; it is therapeutically contested terrain, subject to psychopharmacecutological intervention and remediation on the one hand and surgical abscission and reconstruction on the other.⁵ But it is arguably cosmetic surgery, particularly as practiced in genital

resculpting procedures, an especially prepotent instantiation of commodified desire, that, since the mid-1980s, has most successfully focused on the sexual body and its discontents. It is with two of these transformative aesthetics surgeries—foreskin restoration and laser vaginal rejuvenation—that we will be concerned here.⁶

Since the two forms of genital plastic reformatting are differently gendered and politicized, it is not surprising that their incidence also supports the general observation that although "Body Dysmorphic Disorder is diagnosed with approximately equal frequency in women and in men," "nearly ninety percent of the [cosmetic surgery] operations are performed on women." Males tend to sense a genital deficit, females a genital surplus; males prefer hands-on, do-it-yourself remedies, females favor the cutting edge of professional reconfiguration. Interestingly, the primary site of genital plastic surgery for both sexes is situated in proximately homologous dermal tissue—the labia minora for the female and the prepuce for the male.

The foreskin restoration movement is a marginal social and medical phenomenon and is rooted in the culture of victimization that constitutes the liberal hangover in a conservative age. It is associated with the identity politics of the 1960s and rehabilitative support groups, yet one strand of its identity is reactionary—it embraces the male solidarity of the men's movement and at times seems intent on seizing the moral high ground from feminists. It has clear associations with the natural health movement and specifically Christian, though not overtly fundamentalist, connections. Inevitably, though not consciously, it has anti-Semitic overtones. It is also quintessentially the product of contemporary media culture. It is estimated that there are currently some 10,000 + men engaged in do-it-yourself programs of foreskin stretching; perhaps a few thousand are seeking surgical intervention for restorative purposes.⁸

The restoration movement has spawned four major organizations—the National Organization of Circumcision Information Resource Centers (1985), the National Organization of Restoring Men (1989), the Uncircumcising Information and Resources Center (1991), and the National Organization to Halt the Abuse and Routine Mutilation of Males (1992).⁹ The movement has mounted a sophisticated activist campaign that employs exploitative media techniques borrowed from the tabloid papers and talk television—linking the graphic images of the tabs and the intimately personal testimonial style of the victimized of

the talk shows. It has also appropriated the demonstrative political activism of 1960s protest culture, and has produced two films, *Whose Body, Whose Rights?: Examining the Ethics and the Human Rights Issue of Infant Male Circumcision* (1995) and *They Cut Babies, Don't They: One Man's Struggle Against Circumcision* (1999), and plans a series of demonstrations for Genital Integrity Awareness Week (1-7 April 2002).

Initially a movement targeted towards gay men, foreskin restoration activism brought heterosexual males' disgust and dissatisfaction with their penises out of the closet in the late 1980s. The early advertisements for the nascent NORM, for example, appeared in San Francisco's gay press, but by 1992 the organizational membership paralleled the statistical distribution of gay-straight in the general male population. A report on earlier surgical procedures of restoration noted that nine of eleven patients undergoing the surgery in the mid-1970s were homosexuals. One of the first self-help restoration groups, disseminating instructional information on a system of incremental foreskin stretching utilizing surgical tape and a system of applied torque and tension with weights was Brothers United for Future Foreskins (BUFF, est. 1982). UNCIRC from the beginning was associated with the men's movement—organizations like Men's Rights, Inc. and the National Men's Resource Center that urged their members to "listen inside oneself."¹⁰

When the restoration movement went mainstream in the late 1980s, it was in response to talk-show publicity for adult trauma and genital shame associated with routine infant circumcision. Both R. Wayne Griffiths and Jim Bigelow mention the beginning of their active involvement with the movement stemming from a 1987 *Donahue* show featuring guests Marilyn Milos, founder of NOCIRC, Dr. Dean Edell, who hosted a syndicated call-in radio medical show, and Richard Steiner, a man who had undergone surgical reconstruction procedures, all of whom were early "intactivists."¹¹

Intactivists' sexual politics were angry, confrontational, emotionally exploitative, and sensationalist. The standard practice of infant circumcision is described in their literature as "amputation," and is considered "male genital mutilation" (quite consciously analogized to female genital mutilation): "Before a baby is circumcised, his foreskin must be torn from his glans, literally skinning it alive."¹² Foreskin literature stresses that circumcision excises 50-80% of the total penile

shaft skin, thousands of sensory receptors (Meissner's corpuscles), and 10-20,000 erotogenic nerve endings, altogether 240 feet of nerves and three feet of arteries, veins, and capillaries.¹³

If infant males have been the helpless victims of the radical practice of compulsory circumcision in the post-World War II U.S., who has been their primary victimizer? For circumcision activists, the answer is not far to seek: a misguided and greedy medical establishment profits handsomely from routine circumcision, performing an estimated 1.2 million unnecessary operations annually for a gross take of about \$240 million. Even pediatricians had betrayed their sacred trust. The American Academy of Pediatricians concluded in 1971 that there were no legitimate medical grounds to justify the practice of routine circumcision, but had reversed itself in 1985. Infant circumcision peaked in the U.S. in the 1980s, when an estimated 85% of male babies were circumcised. In 1999, the AAP again declared circumcision medically unnecessary, in the wake of a decade that saw the incidence of the operation fall to 59% of newborns.¹⁴

But beyond the medical profession, the broader reaches of the corporate capitalist system and the general scientific community also profit from the male infant's sexual mutilation. Pharmaceutical and cosmetics companies exploit the discarded prepuces as raw material for primary research. One foreskin protectionist tells us that "corporations such as Advanced Tissue Sciences, Organogenesis, and BioSurface Technology use human foreskins as materials for a type of breathable bandage."¹⁵

More radically politicized anti-circumcision activists consider routine infant circumcision genital mutilation and some would even consider it an act of terrorism. Despite the fact that the original foreskin is irreclaimable, the ends of foreskin restoration remain reclamation of a bodily pre-condition and reformation of the sexual body. Restoration seeks a return to the natural condition of the sexual body, as return to wholeness through a process of "aesthetic body imaging." It seeks to regain the power to (re)shape the body's genital status; no less important are aesthetic considerations and enhanced sexual function.

Testimonials of men (and some women) involved in the foreskin restoration movement reenforce their sense of violation, anger, shame, and genital-sexual inadequacy. Circumcised males typically describe an uneasiness with the appearance of their genitals: I felt a "self-consciousness about the appearance of my circumcised penis," "always

knew there was something wrong with my penis.” More profoundly disturbed by their genital status, other men reported feeling “mutilated, less-than-male,” being always conscious that I was “the odd man out, a *freak* if you like.” “I hated the feeling of being a *freak* among my friends who weren’t cut,” said another.¹⁶

Feelings of freakish genitals expressed by these men were grounded in socially constructed notions of the ideal, intact male body that constituted a countervailing genital aesthetic in a culture in which the overwhelming majority of men had been circumcised.

There was something mythic, archaic, primitively masculine in the uncut penis and these men longed to reconnect with their primordial prepuces. The longing for the intact, prelapsarian body, for the grandeur, the perfection of unretouched maleness comes out clearly in these testimonials. One man declared that his circumcised “penis was weird,” while another referred with disgust and self-loathing to “the ugly tags and remnants of my former perfect penis.” Comparing his sex organ to those of uncircumcised men in the shower, another man observed with shame, “their penises were beautiful, rich, and full. Mine looked scrawny and pink.” For these men, genital difference denoted gender failure and led to a sense of inferiority. Many dissatisfied circumcised men felt that the “uncircumcised penis was more masculine.” Some even doubted the collective national manhood, arguing that “the American male’s penis is a ruined penis.” Given inevitable comparison with uncut peers, many of these men felt incomplete, inferior. “By the time I was in high school,” one man testified, “my masculine identity had been established as one of every other male being better than I was.”¹⁷

But not only genital aesthetics and bodily image drive the restorationists. Of equal concern is sexual function, the pleasure dynamic. For many intactivists, permanent, irrevocable deprivation of sexual sensation is profoundly disturbing. Because of circumcision, one man wrote in an open letter to the doctor who circumcised him, his sex organs had been functionally altered, and “I will never be able to know how sex is supposed to feel. You destroyed the erogenous nerves present in my foreskin [and even with successful reconstruction] it will never feel like it was supposed to feel.” Others echo his sentiments: “Masturbation has never seemed to be anything more than a light release of tension. It has never felt ‘so good’ like it’s supposed to.

Something was missing, and I know it. I had no way of knowing what was missing."¹⁸

And despite two generations of American women who had been culturally conditioned to recognize the circumcised penis as the norm and to prefer the appearance of a trimmed organ, some circumcised men felt sexually inadequate. One man spoke openly of his sexual dysfunction. As a young man, in 30-40 sex acts he reached orgasm only four or five times; in a more permanent relationship his average improved to one in four. While this man's experience may have had physical, neurological, or psychological causes unrelated to his circumcision, it is certainly possible that psychological trauma related to loss of the foreskin was the strongest etiological influence at work here. And the perception of sexual inadequacy acutely felt by some circumcised men is echoed by some women as well. It may not only be that full orgasmic pleasure is denied the circumcised male, but that he is also unable to fully satisfy his sex partner. Consider, for example, the testimony of a registered nurse:

I have found that it is easier to bring a man with a natural, intact penis to full erection and to maintain that erection during the course of an evening, and to do so with less effort, than it is to accomplish the same objective with a man with a circumcised penis. Furthermore, a natural penis provides me with a much more enjoyable rainbow of vaginal sensations, and provides a much more exciting object to fellate.¹⁹

Seeking to overcome the effects of what it perceives as imposed genital deformity and psycho-sexual maiming, the goal of the (re)intact male genital movement is neatly summed up in the name adopted by one of its activist organizations—RECAP (Recover a Penis). Recovery and (re)covering of the penis can be achieved through simple techniques of skin-stretching that require no medical intervention, but for those who have insufficient penile shaft skin remaining after circumcision or who lack the patience for long-term, gradual reconstruction, the surgical option becomes attractive. Commonly referred to as "uncircumcision" or "surgical reconstruction," it is a form of genital cosmetic surgery. One doctor, in fact, bills his procedures as "male cosmetic surgery," and in a rare instance of honesty in advertising, admits that "with any method the penis rarely looks the same as it would if it were not circumcised."²⁰ More typical is the hyperbolic claim that uncircumcision is the embodiment of "penile reform."²¹

For women, too, contemporary plastic surgery offers salvation from the torment of bodily disgust and distaste. Elective surgery offers a postmodern “genital aesthetics” that promises reformed, rejuvenated, and reformatted “designer vulvas,” resculpted genitals. Essentially the response to the relaxation or damage of vaginal muscles, fascia, ligaments, and supporting tissues resulting from parturition and aging, as well as to cultural standards of genital aesthetics for the female, this surgery addresses a similar level of feminine gender discontent as foreskin reconstruction does to male genital malaise. The goals of female genital reconstruction parallel those of penile reform—genital beautification, restoration of the pristine condition of the sexual organs, and intensification of sexual pleasure. The primary procedures undertaken on the female genitals are designer vaginoplasty (the aesthetic enhancement of the labia majora, labia minora, mons pubis, introitus, and perineum) and laser vaginal rejuvenation designed to tighten the vagina and thus enhance sexual gratification (including reduction and augmentation labioplasty, vulvar labioplasty [on the mons pubis]), and hymenoplasty (reconstruction of the hymen).²²

Testimonials from women who have undergone DV and LVR are homologous to those of men who have undertaken foreskin restoration. Like their male counterparts, lack of self-esteem and sexual dysfunction bring women to subject their genitals to surgical intervention. Peer pressure and cultural norms of genital appearance play a prominent role; if it can be said that discontented circumcised men suffer from a kind of penis envy, the candidate for LVR suffers from labia envy.²³ As one woman described her experience of bodily identity, shaped by comparative genital experiences, “. . . when we were changing [during gym class] I could tell what was normal and what was not. I knew that something wasn’t right.” Her perception of abnormality resided in her conviction that her labia minora were too large. Other women testified that “I felt plagued by the size of my labia ever since I was a little girl,” or “I’d see women in locker rooms and magazines and be jealous . . . [after two childbirths] my vagina had that ‘flippy-floppy’ feeling. I could barely feel anything. Sex was just not the same.” Still others confessed to “having always felt inhibited when I was involved in a relationship and my sexuality was suppressed for as long as I can remember. I wasn’t completely proud of my body and felt different from other women”; and trying to reach climax was all but impossible. I felt very uncomfortable having sex.”²⁴

Enhancement of sexual pleasure is often prioritized in testimonials from LVR patients, but it is difficult to tell whether the perception of improved sexual function is real or is primarily a psychological response to the promise of an ameliorated sex life prominently displayed in typical advertisements for LVR procedures. In any case, candidates for this type of cosmetic surgery, like those for surgical reconstruction of the foreskin, are those who have experienced little success or who have become impatient with non-surgical remedies (Kegel exercises). Whether the benefits are real or imagined, women who have undergone LVR give witness of improved sexual functioning. As one woman claimed, "now [sex] is magnificently great. Everything's so much tighter. I can really feel the difference. It's like I'm starting all over again." A female plastic surgeon, Dr. Jane E. Norton, provides physiological support for reports of enhanced sexual pleasure: While the postpartum vagina may have become stretched and relaxed, "men get smaller as they age due to less testosterone in their systems, which can affect the size of their erections and their stamina as well. By tightening the vagina, this can enhance the pleasure for both the woman and the man."²⁵

But the terrain of the female sexual body is more contested than that of the male and consequently there is more interrogation of the claims for surgical enhancement of sexual pleasure through LVR than there is of those made for surgical foreskin restoration. On one side stand the practitioners of redesigned vaginas—the genital plastic surgeons—and their self-selected, emotionally satisfied patients; on the other stand feminist critics and advocates of genital naturalism.

Julia Scheeres, a free-lance writer, clearly laid out the sexual politics of LVR surgery. "All of these genital procedures," she wrote, "are deeply rooted in misogynist notions of the female genitalia as ugly, dirty and shameful." "Just when it seemed," she continued,

that cosmetic surgeons had run out of body parts to plunder, they discovered a new area: the female genitalia. Suddenly, there's a beauty standard for the vulva and the vagina: smooth, small and hairless. The prepubescent look is in; natural, normal genitalia are out.²⁶

Ultimately, the new model pudenda have not realized the promise of greater sexual fulfillment for women, but have simply imposed "creepy new beauty standards" that have only meant for women that

in our quest to mimic that most American icon of beauty, Barbie, we've stuffed silicone bags into our chests, paralyzed our expressions with bacteria injections, and died vacuuming fat from our hips and thighs. Now we can have Barbie's smooth synthetic crotch as well.²⁷

Scheeres' Barbie connection brings us to the heart of the cultural controversy over female genital cosmetic surgery. Mary F. Rogers has teased out the implications of Barbie Culture for the deconstruction of the feminine from the perspective of contemporary cultural theory. "Barbie," she writes,

is an icon whose "perfect" body is more attainable than ever before. She exists most widely as an icon in those cultures where women cannot escape endless messages about how to improve, enhance, rework, and even perfect their deficient, flawed bodies. She has iconic force in cultures where one is never too young nor too old to make use of the artifices marketed as instruments of feminine success. Barbie is iconic, then, of a somatics as mind boggling in its reach as her accessories are. . . . Overall, Barbie's is a body signaling the emergence of the technobody in commodity cultures.²⁸

The commodification of the female sexual body has been reinforced, too, by paradigmatic popular cultural images ranging from the idealized centerfolds of glossy pictorial publications like *Playboy* to the up-close and personal images of hard-core porno videos. As Elizabeth Haiken observed, "before crotch shots were published nobody was interested in this, but now everyone knows what labia are supposed to look like."²⁹ Lest one think that the Bunny connection is simply a sign of feminist disgruntlement with a male-oriented plastic body, cosmetic genital surgeons themselves have acknowledged its effect. Dr. Gary Alter has described it as the "*Penthouse* effect." Dr. David Matlock claims that "women of the world inspired all of the surgical designs." He cites the airbrushed Bunnies of *Playboy* as the *belle ideale* of female genitalia. "Honestly," he says,

if you look at *Playboy*, those women, on the outer vagina area, the vulva is very aesthetically appealing, the vulva is rounded. It's full, it's not flat. . . . Women were coming in saying, 'I want something different, I want to change things.' Then look at *Playboy*, the ideal woman *per se*, for the body and the shape and so on. You don't see women in there with excessively long labia minora.³⁰

Idealization of female genitalia according to a sanitized standard of perfection may be the immediate result of popular erotic culture, but hymenoplasty implies a genital retrogression to a prepubescent stage when the connection with Barbie was more immediate, a mode of body reshaping that suggests a closer connection with anorexia than it does with sexual desire. Dr. Matlock's hymenoplasty clientele has typically been Islamic and Japanese women preparing for pre-nuptial examinations to establish their maidenhood. Increasingly, however, a growing number of American women are seeking the "virgin experience." Matlock simply "works with what's already there and then stitches up the area to bring it to the state before virginity was lost."³¹ The operation is often undertaken for romantic reasons—to have the "first time experience" with a new sex partner, or to reclaim a lost sense of innocence. A Texas woman described her sense of sexual renewal in ecstatic terms—"I feel the excitement—like I'm a virgin again!" Less enthusiastic critics describe the newly-minted, re-virgined body in less flattering terms as that of a woman with "little doll-like genitals," perhaps hermetically resealed like the smooth pubis of the plastic Barbie body.³²

At the epicenter of the controversy over female cosmetic reconstructive genital surgery is the developer of LVR, the dean of the "Born-Again Virgins," Dr. David Matlock. Matlock claims to have averaged some 500 vaginoplasties annually since he pioneered his laser technique in 1996.³³ Among his patients, he has the reputation of being a "woman's doctor," and he stresses that his LVR procedure "is driven by women, and it's for women. . . . The woman is the artist, and we are the instrument she uses to express herself in her image."³⁴ Matlock casts himself as the paladin of the pudenda, providing the medical intervention to facilitate female sexual liberation and erotic equality. "There are over 25 medications," he points out,

for male impotence. . . . Is there anything remotely similar for women? No. Not at all. There are 200 prosthetic devices for men on the market. Anything similar for women? Not at all. If men had problems like that—if men had babies, and we had certain body parts stretched out as a result—they would have been looked at, researched and solved a long time ago.³⁵

Yet, what Matlock offers women is the reconstructed body as commodity. His ads play on bodily fear and shame and promise an erotic utopia through vaginal rejuvenation.

"Ladies," a come-on ad sets up its pitch, "if you are self-conscious about showing 'The Full Monty' there is a solution. . . . You won't believe how good sex can be!"³⁶ Matlock has also appeared on the talk radio circuit—he was lauded by Howard Stern—is scheduled to publish an article in *Marie Claire* and has a pop self-promotional book in the works entitled "What the Gynecologist Didn't Tell You." He is reported to be "poised to launch an international franchising and licensing network [riding] on the edge of a cresting wave that has already made him a millionaire several times over."³⁷ Though some critics argue that mainline ob/gyn professionals oppose Matlock's procedures, the relevant professional organizations seem to have taken a neutral stance. Neither the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists nor the American Medical Women's Association nor the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors, and Therapists has taken an official position on either cosmetic reconstructive or erotic enhancement surgery.³⁸

Despite the gushing enthusiasm of a well-satisfied customer with a resculpted vulva and rejuvenated vagina attached to her otherwise chronologically aged flesh, who swore that "this man is like the creator of women. They call him the Picasso of woman's vagina. It's true, he does make you totally new,"³⁹ the nagging question remains: new for whom? The tighter, young vagina is an aesthetic product designed for display and use, but who is the end-use consumer? When pushed, women who have undergone Matlock's procedures seem to know. As one woman put it, "my husband says he has the same wife, but a new woman." Another woman was even more direct about the enhanced erotic pleasure of her reconstructed vagina. "You give more pleasure to a man," she says, "which affects your own sense of sexual gratification. It's not necessarily about having better orgasms. It's the way you feel as a woman."⁴⁰ When Matlock lets his guard down, he can be brutally frank on the benefits of LVR. He told a female interviewer that the procedure could prevent husbands from running after younger women. "Why not have the best sex you can at home?," he asked. "You tell me why these 40,50,60-year-old men are running after younger women? They want these women with these nice, hot, tight _____. "⁴¹

LVR, then, is not so much a procedure to liberate female eroticism where women can reclaim their desire, but merely a new weapon in the war against aging, an embodied product to cater to male sexual fantasies and pleasure and thus forestall the abandonment of aging wives. The promise of the perfected female sexual body, marketed as a means to the enhancement of female sexual pleasure only serves to reinforce the subordination of female desire to the needs of the male in the traditional patriarchal order. The *Playboy* Bunny body and the Barbie body remain the subordinated signs of an unreconstructed female desire in a cosmetically reconstituted body.

In the scopophilic theology of the sexual body, a secularized, pop evangelism of desire is incorporated in the exploitative culture of the flesh. The final phase of the cycle of bodily redemption is plastic surgery, which provides transcendence of the abjected body through its perfection. The sanctification that comes with grace, mediated by the concentrated light of the surgical laser, offers social redemption and bodily resurrection. The cycle of embodied grace has moved the spectator from deprivation, bodily disgust and discontent to body-ego reconciliation, and finally to the promise of the elimination of bodily imperfection altogether.

Yet, as we have seen, the ideal postmodern body, the body beyond the abjected flesh, remains a contested site for continuing struggles over gender, power, and personal identity. The artificial perfection of the flesh deconstructs the earth-bound, natural body, idealizing a mimetic, immortal, plastic body as the ideal form of embodiment in its place. As Mary F. Rogers has observed,

the modern body is far from "natural" . . . and the post-modern body extends that development along the pathway toward technoselfhood. . . That means . . . that dominant norms about appearance will shape a greater number of bodies, especially as body-altering techniques become more affordable. Rather than customizing their bodies, then, many people will be standardizing them along lines paralleling the imagery promoted by icons like Barbie.⁴²

Now, more than ever, the condemned body of our discontent and alienated desire has been internalized and reabsorbed under the sign of transcendence of the flesh, transformation of desire in an artificially reproduced, retrogressive simulacrum of prelapsarian grace. The postmodern body has been detached from its materiality, surgical body

sculpting has become the vehicle for the technological transformation of the “sin ego,” and the flesh has been transubstantiated into plastic. Plasticity has become the “postmodern paradigm”;⁴³ for both male and female body-image Barbie malleability and genitally smooth perfection has become the ideal, and cosmetic surgery has rendered the erotically and aesthetically undesired and the natural body alike obsolete.

Notes

¹ The phrase is Aaron Beck's, quoted in Jean Goodwin and Reina Attias, *Splintered Reflections: Images of the Body in Trauma* (New York: Basic Books, 1999) 168.

² American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSMM-IV)*, 4th ed. (Washington, DC, 1994) 467.

³ Sigmund Freud. *The Ego and the Id* (1923), rpt. in J. Strachey, ed. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 19 (London: Hogarth P, 1961) 17. In Fn.2 on this page Freud further elaborates, “. . . the ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations, chiefly from those springing from the surface of the body. It may thus be regarded as a mental projection of the surfaces of the body . . .”

⁴ Goodwin and Attias, *Splintered Reflections* 168.

⁵ The quoted phrases are from Didier Anzieu, *The Skin Ego* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989) 6.

⁶ One of the more recent innovations in male enhancement surgery redoubles its resurrectional qualities. Surgeons have pioneered the use of alloderm (cadaver skin) in place of the traditional homoderm and fat grafts to increase penile circumference, thus accomplishing a double “raising of the dead.”

⁷ *DSMM-IV*, 467; and Kathy Davis, *Reshaping the Female Body: The Dilemma of Cosmetic Surgery* (New York: Routledge, 1995) 21. Roughly 80% of aesthetic operations are performed on white women.

⁸ See Dick Schultheiss, Michael C. Truss et al., “Uncircumcision: A Historical Review of Preputial Restoration,” *Plastic Reconstruction Surgery* 101 (1998), rpt. at <<http://www.infocirc.org,uncirc.html>>. In *Circumcision Exposed: Rethinking a Medical and Cultural Tradition* (Freedom, CA: Crossing P, 1998) 138-39, Billy Ray Boyd cites an estimate from *Sex Life* of 7-10,000 men currently undergoing foreskin reconstruction in the U.S.

⁹ Jim Bigelow, *The Joy of Uncircumcising* (Aptos, CA: Hourglass Book Pub., 1995), 27-29. The first foreskin restoration organization seems to have been Jeffrey R. Wood's INTACT, established in 1976. Currently, NORM has 27 U.S. chapters and five abroad.

¹⁰ Bigelow 112. See also Barry Newman, “Restoration Campaign—Intactivists Seek to Undo a Long-Practiced Ritual,” *Wall Street Journal* 28 Dec. 2000, A1, and Donald M. Grier, Paul C. Mohl, and Kathy A. Shelly, “A Technique for Foreskin Reconstruction and Some Preliminary Results,” *Journal of Sex Research* 18.4 (November 1982): 324-30, p. 330. In this sample, then, 82% of the restorationists were gay.

¹¹ Newman, "Restoration Campaign," and Bigelow 128. In pop culture, an episode of *St. Elsewhere* (16 Dec. 1987) followed Victor Bevine, who entered the hospital for foreskin restoration.

¹² Paul M. Fleiss, "The Foreskin is Necessary," originally published as "The Case Against Circumcision in *Mothering* (Winter 1997): 36-45. On amputation, see Bigelow 37. On male genital mutilation, see the extensive comparison of male to female genital mutilation in the respective policy statements of the American Academy of Pediatrics' Task Force on Circumcision and Committee on bioethics, <<http://www.circumstitions.com/AAP.html>>, and "MGM: Male Circumcision: A Gender Perspective," *Journal of Men's Studies* VI.2 (1998): 198-208 (found on the internet at <<http://www.mensstudies.com>> or <<http://www.noharm.org>>).

¹³ "The Foreskin Advantage," <<http://www.noharm.org/advantage.html>>, 1; "Circumcision in America," <<http://www.salon.com/mwt/feature/1998/10/26/feature.html>>, 4; and Fleiss 2.

¹⁴ For figures on the annual incidence of and profits from circumcision, see Thomas J. Ritter and George C. Dennison, *Say No to Circumcision: 40 Compelling Reasons*, 2nd ed. (Aptos, CA: Hourglass Book P, 1996) 29.1. On the APA's shifting position, see John Sedgwick, "The Foreskin Saga," <<http://www.infocirc.org/GQ0200.htm>>; on comparative figures for the 1980s and 1990s, see Bigelow 19.

¹⁵ Billy Ray Boyd, *Circumcision Exposed: Rethinking a Medical and Cultural Tradition* (Freedom, CA: Crossing P, 1998) 53; and Fleiss 3.

¹⁶ Bigelow 25, 27, 28. My emphasis.

¹⁷ Bigelow 90, 100, 102, 108, and 123.

¹⁸ Bigelow 96-97, and 21.

¹⁹ Bigelow 104 and 10. See Dr. Patrick Hudson's cosmetic plastic surgery homepage, <<http://www.phudson.com/Genital/uncircumcision.html>>.

²⁰ On circumcision in the U.S., see Ritter and Dennison, *Say No to Circumcision* 29.1. The term "penile reform" is the title of an article by J. Penn in the *British Journal of Plastic Surgery* 16 (1963): 287-88. The most popular sources for self-restoration are the materials distributed by BUFF, NORM, UNCIRC, and Jim Bigelow's inspirational and instructional manual, *The Joy of Uncircumcising*, with its intentional refraction of Alex Comfort's *The Joy of Sex*. See Dr. David Matlock's web page for the Laser Vaginal Rejuvenation Institute of Los Angeles that he directs, <<http://www.drmatlock.com/laserVR.htm>>, and "Vaginal Rejuvenation," by Dr. B. Kashanchi, <<http://www.obgyn911.com/vaginal2.html>>.

²¹ See Bigelow 133, and Nicholas Regush, "Genital Redesign," 11 May 2000 <<http://www.abcnews.go.com/sections/living/SecondOpinion/html>>.

²² See "The Facts of Life, and Vaginal Tightening," <<http://www.my.webmd.com/content/article/html>> 3, "Testimonials" from the LVR Institute, L.A., <<http://www.drmatlock.com/testimonials.htm>> 2, and Debra Ollivier, "Designer Vaginas," <<http://www.salon.com/sex/feature/2000/11/14/vagina.html>>, 1.

²³ "Facts of Life, and Vaginal Tightening" 1.

²⁴ Scheeres, "Sexpressions: Vaginal Cosmetic Surgery," <http://thriveonline.oxygen_xpressionsvaginal_cosmetic_surgery.html>, 1-2.

²⁵ Scheeres 1-2. See also Carol Queen, "Meanwhile, in L.A. Plastic Surgeon's Offices," <http://www.spectator.net/EDPAGES/1137_cq.html>, Lynda Gorov, "The Latest Fad From LA-LA Land: A 'Designer Vagina', and Jen Loy (of *Fabula* magazine), "Pushing the Perfect Pussy," both at <<http://www.jendajournal.com/jenda/Vol1.1/Dvagina.html>> –this is the on-line version of *Jenda: A Journal of Culture and African Women's Studies* (2001).

²⁶ Mary F. Rogers, *Barbie Culture* (London: Sage Pubs., 1999) 122-23. See pp. 120-21 for her connection of Barbie to cosmetic surgery.

²⁷ Quoted from a *Salon* magazine interview in Loy, "Pushing the Perfect Pussy, 3. See also "Facts of Life, and Vaginal Tightening," 3.

²⁸ For the Alter quote, see Loy, "Pushing the Perfect Pussy," 3. Matlock's quoted remarks appear in Lisa Derrick, "Dr. Tight," 30 April 1998, <<http://www.newtimesla.com/issues/1998-04-30/columns2.html>> 2 (my emphasis). See also Debra Ollivier, "Female Genital surgery Goes Public," *USA Today*, 14 Nov. 2000, rpt. at <<http://www.jendajournal.com/jenda/vol1.1/Dvagina.html>> 17, and Richard Connelly, "Like a Virgin: KPRC Kicks Off Another Mind-Boggling Sweeps Month," 9 Nov. 2000 <<http://www.houstonpress.com>>. See also the advertisement for Virgin Me Inc. (Miami, FL) at <http://www.virginme.com>: "Doctor-Approved Scientific Breakthrough that will transform a Non-Virgin girl into a complete virgin! Experience the pain and bleeding on the first night as if you were a real virgin!"

²⁹ Connelly, "Like a Virgin," 1; See also Michael Learmouth, "Virgin Surgeon," <<http://www.metroactive.com/papers/metro/12.24.98/virgin2-9851.html>>, 2, Mike Falon, "Female Gender Surgery Goes Public," <<http://www.jendajournal.com/jenda/vol1.1/Dvagina.html>>, 12, and "Testimonials," web page of the LVI of L.A., 3.

³⁰ Ollivier, "Designer Vaginas," 17.

³¹ Gorov 1. The phrase "Laser Vaginal Rejuvenation" is trademarked, as is its acronym, "LVR."

³² Ollivier, "Designer Vaginas," 15. See also Derrick, "Dr. Tight," 3.

³³ "Facts of Life, and Vaginal Tightening," 2.

³⁴ Stephanie Ramp, "Plastic Surgery Moves South," *Fairfield County Weekly* 4 Aug. 2000, 7.

³⁵ Ollivier, "Designer Vaginas," 2, 16.

³⁶ Ollivier, "Designer Vaginas," 16.

³⁷ Rogers 124.

³⁸ See Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1993) 245-46.

The Last Frontier: Body Norms and Hair Removal Practices in Contemporary American Culture

Sarah Hildebrandt

As the theme and title of the 2001 meeting of the AAAS aptly illustrates, the body has become the focus of considerable attention in the last few decades, both within the academy and in popular culture at large. As Linda McDowell argues,

as we move towards the end of the twentieth century, the body has become a major theoretical preoccupation across the social sciences, as well as an object for scrutiny and regulation by society as a whole (36).

The centrality of the body is understood in part as the consequence of profound changes that have taken place in late 20th-century industrialized nations, including the United States. Rapid economic development and resulting changes in work and leisure have placed the body at the centre of concern for both the individual and society. Because we live our lives as embodied subjects, our understandings and experiences of our bodies are extremely personal and intimate. At the same time, our bodies have important cultural meaning, signifying social and political concerns. Accordingly,

questions about the body, its form, meaning and its practices are associated with complicated issues about subjectivity and identity and with social practices often defined both as deeply personal and as subjects of public comment (McDowell 36).

My research, on body hair norms and practices, is situated within the context of this ongoing academic dialogue about the body. Despite the considerable focus on the body in recent scholarship, there is little evidence of substantial interest in body hair.¹ Although little ethnographic or statistical data exists, various industry estimates suggest that between 80 and 90% of American women and girls practice regular body hair removal (see Hope 93). The removal of body hair is thus extremely widespread, yet largely unexamined. In this sense it provides an ideal subject matter: as Christine Hope argues, "those behaviours

which are most taken-for-granted in a culture may well be the most important ones for revealing an understanding of that culture" (93). The subject is also particularly timely: as I argue below, there is growing evidence that the hairless imperative is increasingly a concern of men as well as women.²

Body hair norms and practices have considerable implications for our understandings of gender and sexuality. Because body hair is a sexually dimorphic trait, the removal of body hair by women is often seen as exaggerating this difference, and thus the absence or removal of body hair has come to signify femininity. However, the growing practice of body hair removal by men complicates this understanding, and is perhaps best examined in the context of the "crisis of masculinity" and gender relations after Second Wave feminism. Despite these important differences in cultural meaning between the body hair practices of women and men, the focus below will be on a theme *common* to the hair removal practices of both genders: the relationships between body hair removal, the public display, objectification and scrutiny of the body, and Foucauldian understandings of power and the docile body.

"Public" and "Private:" A History of Female Body Hair Removal

In order to explore the relationships between body hair norms and concepts of "public" and "private," it is first necessary to examine the intersections between fashion, the display of the body, and body hair removal. While relatively little research has been done on the history of body hair norms (see Cooper), an important study by Christine Hope provides an indispensable history of the development of female body hair norms in the United States. In her article "Caucasian Female Body Hair" (1982), Hope examines print advertisements in American magazines from 1915-1945 for clues to the evolution of body hair norms.³ She concludes that prior to 1915 few (if any) women in the United States removed their leg or underarm hair. However, from 1915-1919 Hope identifies a veritable "assault on underarm hair" in advertisements. Ads relating to hair removal increased continually throughout this period, with the majority (72%) referring specifically to underarms. Significantly, these advertisements were largely instructional in nature,⁴ informing women that "new styles of dress featuring sleeveless or very sheer-sleeved evening gowns made the removal of hair from the underarms an important consideration" (Hope

94). The removal of underarm hair was thus linked to new fashions that revealed a previously hidden part of the body.

Between 1920 and the early 1940's, Hope found that advertisements for hair removal products began to refer for the first time to the "lower limbs," or legs. These ads again focused on the relationship between hair removal and fashion, emphasizing shorter hemlines, relatively sheer stockings, and barelegged styles of swimwear. However, it was not until the war years of 1941-1945 that advertisements began to focus directly on legs, and the instructional nature of these ads indicates that the removal of leg hair was not an established norm prior to that time. Hair removal continued to be linked with fashion: difficulty attaining silk stockings due to the war and the introduction of sheer nylons made it increasingly difficult to "disguise" newly visible, hairy legs.

Hope's study demonstrates that by the end of the Second World War, the major components of American body hair norms – the removal of leg and underarm hair by women – were securely in place. In other words, these practices had become normative. Significantly, her study reveals a distinct and important relationship between fashion, the display of the body, and body hair removal. As this history illustrates, the more clothes women were "allowed" (or expected) to remove, the more hair they were also expected to remove (see Chapkis 130; Greer 28). Prior to 1915, clothing styles did not reveal much of the female body. Because legs and underarms were not visible in contemporary clothing, hair in these areas was not yet significantly *problematized*. However, as changing clothing styles exposed more and more of the female body throughout the past century, visible hair was *problematized*, and consequently removed.

Unfortunately, Hope's study ends in 1945 and does not address another significant aspect of the body hair practices of American women and girls: "bikini line" hair removal. The term "bikini line" is generally understood to describe any pubic hair that is visible beyond the boundaries of a typical swimsuit. Like the legs and underarms, removal of hair from the bikini line is now normative. The history of fashion and body hair removal suggests that it can be safely assumed that women began removing this hair when bathing suit styles became so abbreviated that this area of the body was no longer covered.⁵ Indeed, the term "bikini line" itself suggests that the removal of this hair is related to the introduction of the bikini to the United States in 1946.

While the removal of hair from the legs, underarms, and “bikini line” has thus been normative for American women for some fifty years, the female body today is increasingly expected to be *virtually hairless*, as the new trend of the Brazilian wax illustrates. Described in the popular press as “the hottest new craze” (Keyishian 158) and “the latest bikini-wax phenomenon sweeping the United States” (Ellen), the term “Brazilian wax” refers to the removal (using wax) of the vast majority of the pubic hair, usually leaving behind only a small strip or triangle of hair. Except for this strip, all hair is removed from the pubic area, including the labia and anus. While statistics are unavailable regarding the extent of this practice,⁶ popular media sources (especially women’s magazines) present the practice as increasingly widespread, relying largely on reports and estimates from aestheticians, salons, and “beauty experts.”⁷

Significantly, body hair removal is again associated with changing fashion. As the name for the practice indicates, the Brazilian wax finds its origins in Brazil, where it is linked to the thong bathing suit popular in that country (see Keyishian 158). Because the thong is particularly revealing, a Brazilian wax may be required in order for the wearer to avoid displaying any pubic hair – the standard bikini line wax is no longer adequate. While the bikini created the “need” for the removal of hair from the bikini line, this more abbreviated swimsuit style requires more extensive hair removal.

Emerging hair removal practices such as the Brazilian wax thus fit the pattern that emerges from Hope’s study of body hair norms in the first half of the century: clearly, there is a consistent and important relationship between hairlessness and the exposure of the body through changing fashion. What this relationship implies is that when a previously hidden area of the body is publicly exposed through changing clothing styles, the hair on that part of the body is problematized, and must be removed. In other words, the only flesh suitable for public view is *cultivated* flesh. Until recently, the only area of the female body where any body hair remained “acceptable” was the pubic area – one of the few areas of the body that remains private or unexposed, even in the skimpiest bikini. Thus, it is the *public* display of the body that requires hairlessness. Body hair thus comes to signify the “private” body, while its absence signifies the “public.”

The emergence of the Brazilian wax takes this analysis to another level. While the practice does correlate with the popularity of the thong

bikini, the possibility that the Brazilian wax is related to the wearing of thong *panties* (as opposed to the publicly worn thong swimsuit) is particularly interesting, considering that panties are ordinarily private and seen (generally) only by intimates. In this way, the growing practice of the Brazilian wax may represent the first time that a private, hidden part of the body is problematized in this way. The removal of hair from the pubic area suggests that standards for *public* display are now becoming part of even the *private* realm.⁸ This has significant implications regarding the management and scrutiny of the body, as discussed below.

Men and the Emerging Hairless Ideal

Because body hair removal has long played an important role in the construction of the ideal feminine body, it is generally associated with women and girls. However, there is growing evidence to suggest that hair removal is increasingly the domain of men as well as women. Visual imagery in print advertisements, reports from aestheticians, and other sources suggest that American men, in growing numbers, are removing the hair from their chests, backs, and stomachs. While the development of this apparent "trend" is overdetermined by a number of intersecting factors (such as a growing male beauty culture, consumer capitalism, and a youth-oriented culture), it is generally linked to the bodybuilding and fitness craze of the 1980's and the emergence of "gay aesthetics" into the mainstream.

The practice of body hair removal by men has obvious differences from the practice by women: different areas of the body are targeted, and men's body hair removal is nowhere near as pervasive as the same practice by women. It is also important to note that men's body hair removal has cultural meaning that is significantly different from that of women, especially in relation to gender construction and the "crisis of masculinity." However, for our purposes here, what is significant is that the history of men's hair removal provides further evidence that hair removal is distinctly related to the public display of the body – female *or* male. While men's body hair removal does not correlate to increased exposure of the male body through changing fashion, the practice *does* emerge in the context of the increased exhibition or display of the male body (see Smith 82). In the past two decades, in advertisements and in popular culture at large, the male body has increasingly been presented

as the object of an appraising – and critical – gaze. Coinciding with this increased visibility has been a rapidly growing industry of products and services related to the “improvement” of the male body.⁹ The emerging practice of hair removal by men is thus one of a number of significant cultural changes regarding the treatment of the male body. Together, these changes reflect *the growing problematization of the male body*. Thus, as the male body is increasingly displayed, it is also increasingly scrutinized and problematized. For men as well as women, the only flesh suitable for display in this context is *cultivated* flesh – flesh cultivated through the removal of body hair.

Discipline, Surveillance, and the Docile Body

The practice of body hair removal by both women and men is thus clearly linked to the growing public nature and display of the body.¹⁰ If, as we have seen, the hairless body is the public body, then body hair norms can thus serve as an important index to the increasingly public nature of the body. For both genders, there is ample evidence of a trend toward both increased display of the body and increased hair removal. Significantly, the increased exposure of the body implies that it has become the target of greater problematization and scrutiny. This growing surveillance of the body has significant implications regarding the management of the self and the operation of power in a Foucauldian sense.

The ideas of French theorist Michel Foucault have had a wide-ranging influence on Cultural Studies, anthropology, philosophy, Women’s Studies, and other fields of study. In particular, his reconceptualization of *power* has inspired new ways of addressing gender relations and issues surrounding the female body. As Susan Bordo (1993) argues,

[to] the extent that feminist discourse *has* employed a framework of oppressors and oppressed, villains and victims (and this, of course, is not equally true of all writers), it requires reconstruction if it is to be able adequately to theorize the pathways of modern power (26).

In Foucault’s conception, modern power is not something that can be *possessed* by individuals or groups, but must be understood as a dynamic or network of forces. This conceptualization thus provides a

means of understanding how power and domination are forces that operate not (solely) as the function of the oppressor upon the oppressed, but rather as a dynamic operating not "from above," but often "from below" (Bordo 27). Thus, Foucault's understanding of power has a distinct relationship to the management of the self. This concept of power has allowed feminist theory to reconceptualize women's participation in beauty culture (which includes body hair removal), a practice that may be viewed as "voluntary" participation in women's own oppression.

An important implication of Foucault's concept of power is that modern society has witnessed the emergence of *increasingly invasive* apparatuses of power: "Power now seeks to transform the minds of those individuals who might be tempted to resist it, not merely to punish or imprison their bodies" (Bartky 79). A primary example is the treatment and discipline of the body. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault develops his idea of the docile body: "[a] body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" (136). Docility is achieved through various "disciplines," which regulate the postures, movements, and gestures of the body (137-138). No direct application of force is necessary to enact social control: through the enactment and re-enactment of everyday bodily practices, the docile body serves the prevailing relations of dominance and subordination.

Body hair removal can be understood as one of these everyday bodily practices that achieve the docile body. In this framework, then, the regular removal of body hair, the enactment and re-enactment of a daily bodily practice, is a way of disciplining and regulating the body, producing docility. It is important, therefore, to recognize the role that gender plays in this configuration. After all, it is primarily women who are expected to remove their body hair (and otherwise participate in "beauty culture"). This has been a major feminist criticism of Foucault: as Sandra Bartky argues, Foucault treats "the body" as if it were one – as if the experiences of women and men are the same. In doing so, Foucault ignores the disciplinary practices that *engender* the body, producing the specifically "feminine" or "masculine" body. In Bartky's argument, women's bodies are made *more* docile than the bodies of men, through the various disciplines that constitute "femininity." As an integral part of the production of this feminine body, the removal of body hair thus produces a female body that is more docile and more disciplined. The more docile body of the American woman thus reflects

what Foucault describes as the prevailing relations of dominance and subordination, as the United States remains a basically patriarchal society.

As discussed above, in Foucault's model, no direct force is necessary for the operation of modern power. How then is docility achieved? For Foucault, the essence of the disciplinary society is captured in Jeremy Bentham's design for the model prison: the Panopticon (1843). Briefly, the Panopticon consists of a central guard tower surrounded by a circle of individual cells, housing prisoners, madmen, or patients. Each inmate is separated and invisible to the other, but visible at all times to the central tower and the guards within. The major effect of the Panopticon is "to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power." The inmate cannot be sure that she or he is being observed at any given moment, but is acutely aware of that *potential* at all times. The effect is thus that the inmate behaves at all times *as if* she or he is being watched. As Foucault argues,

there is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself (qtd. in Bordo 27).

The Panopticon thus encourages *individual self-surveillance*. Knowing that his or her behaviour could be observed at any given time, the inmate takes over the job of policing himself or herself.

Clearly, in Foucault's model, it is the awareness of the inspecting gaze that creates the self-policing, self-managing, docile subject. How then does this inspecting, "panoptical" gaze operate in contemporary American society? While the answers to this question are multiple and complicated, one explanation is the representation and objectification of the body in mass media. As demonstrated above, body hair norms illustrate that the body has become increasingly public, and thus increasingly subject to a scrutinizing gaze. Significantly, this development has occurred in tandem with the growth of the mass media, consumer culture, and the growing power of the image.¹¹ As Mike Featherstone argues, images "make individuals more conscious of external appearance, bodily presentations and 'the look'" (179). In making individuals more conscious of the inspecting gaze, an image-

saturated media may thus play a significant role in constructing what Sandra Bartky describes as a “panoptical connoisseur” in the individual consciousness:

In contemporary patriarchal culture, *a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women*: they stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgment. Woman lives her body as seen by another, by an anonymous patriarchal Other (72, emphasis mine).

Just as the inmate in the Panopticon behaves as if s/he is being watched at all times, in Bartky’s argument, women experience their bodies as if they are constantly under the scrutiny of others – particularly men. Bartky also suggests that the mass media play a contributing role in this construction, “constructing as [they do] an image of the female body as spectacle.” Mass media thus present the female body as the constant object of the inspecting gaze, creating self-policing subjects, selves committed to a relentless self-surveillance and discipline.

While women certainly face an unequal share of this scrutiny, the growing objectification of the male body (and the burgeoning male beauty industry, of which body hair removal is a part) suggests that the inspecting gaze is increasingly affecting men as well. As the growing hairlessness norm indicates, *both* genders are spending more and more time disciplining their bodies. As the male body is increasingly displayed as spectacle in mass media imagery,¹² men are beginning to remove their body hair and otherwise groom their bodies in unprecedented ways. At the same time, standards for women’s body hair removal suggest an unprecedented ideal of virtual hairlessness, as illustrated by the growing trend of the Brazilian wax. In other words, as Bordo argues, women “are spending more time on the management and discipline of our bodies than we have in a long, long time” (166). Body hair norms for both genders thus exemplify Foucault’s concept of the operation of modern power through self-discipline and the management of the self.

Conclusions

The title of this article, “The Last Frontier,” comes from two sources. The first, a 1972 article in *Ms.* magazine with the same title, argues that despite feminist resistance to what were generally seen as “oppressive” beauty norms, the beauty requirement of body hair removal went largely

unchallenged, making body hair “the last frontier” in the Second Wave feminist battle against an “oppressive” femininity. This idea of a “battle” is important. As Foucault came to understand, where there is power there is also resistance. If the body and its daily habits, routines, and practices can serve as a site of social control, then the body can also serve as an important site of resistance. And resistance seems more important than ever: if both women and men are spending more and more time on the maintenance and discipline of their bodies, as the growing hairless imperative suggests, then this struggle is particularly timely.

The second source of this title is Linda McDowell’s assertion that the growing focus on the exteriority of the body and its malleability has led some critics to identify the body as “the *last frontier* in postmodernity” (37, emphasis mine). This malleability, this postmodern plasticity, is reflected in the popularity of body modifications from cosmetic surgery and dieting to piercing, tattooing, and branding. While body hair removal has been a part of this cultivation, this malleability (and hair is the most malleable, renewable part of the body), the expansion of the hairless imperative to include previously unproblematic parts of both the female and male bodies suggest that in this sense, body hair may truly be the last frontier.

Notes

¹ Notable exceptions include Basow, Basow and Braman, Cooper, Hope, Synnott, and Tiggeman and Kenyon.

² For the purposes of this study, “body hair” is defined as any and all hair that grows below the neck on the female or male body. For women, the focus is on hair that appears on the body with puberty (such as pubic and underarm hair), as well as that which darkens, thickens, or coarsens at this time (primarily leg hair). For men, the areas of body hair that are primarily addressed in this study are the chest, stomach, and back.

³ It is important to note that Hope’s study addresses only *Caucasian* body hair norms. Due to a lack of ethnographic data on actual body hair practices in the United States, this discussion excludes variables such as race/ethnicity, class, etc. The exclusion of these variables does not imply that they are insignificant – for example, there is some evidence to suggest that the practice of body hair removal may vary significantly by race. Just as different groups have different skin tones, etc., body hair distribution too differs by group. In a culture that idealizes hairlessness, body hair norms may thus have significant racial (or racist) implications that are unfortunately beyond the scope of the current study.

⁴ Hope categorizes the advertisements she encountered in her study as either primarily instructive (encouraging new or innovative behaviour), or product-based (simply

encouraging consumers to use a particular product). The instructive role played by the mass media is important: as Hope argues, "it seems to be the advertisers of hair removal products who first 'educated' American women about the importance of removing underarm hair" (95).

⁵ This would be a very useful addendum to Hope's study.

⁶ While the actual numbers of women practicing the Brazilian wax are unknown, with the pornography industry at least, the removal of female pubic hair is widespread. While a discussion of body hair removal within a pornographic context is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that magazines such as *Playboy* reveal a steady trend toward increased hairlessness in female models. The Brazilian wax appears for the first time on *Playboy* centerfold models in the 1990's.

⁷ Women's fashion magazines (and other mass media forms) play an important role in normalizing bodily ideals and behaviours (cf. Bordo). One way that this normalization is achieved is through the creation of pictures of "reality." Whether or not the practice truly is widespread, in describing the Brazilian wax as "the latest trend," these magazines present the style as popular and normative.

⁸ While the practice of the Brazilian wax may relate to the increased exposure of the pubic area in "public" contexts such as the beach and even in pornography (cf. Betty Dodson in Castleman), the vulva remains a "private" part of the body in most contexts.

⁹ For example, in 1997 the men's toiletries market was reported as growing at a rate of 7% per year (Kivlehan 42).

¹⁰ The difference between the literal exposure of the body through fashion and the "objectification" of the body in visual imagery is a matter that must be taken into consideration. It is not only the literal display of the body that results in its problematization, but a particular *kind* of display. As discussed below, the context of that display is important: consumer culture. For, as Heather Addison argues, "[if] consumers could be convinced to be continually critical of their bodies, manufacturers and advertisers would benefit" (9). In other words, the body provides an ideal arena for consumption, since each consumer has a body, and each body is constantly changing.

¹¹ For a discussion of the influence of consumer culture on the cultural treatment of the body, see Addison and Featherstone.

¹² As stated above, this is not the only factor that determines men's body hair removal.

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The Pierced and Tattooed Body: The Branded Skin-ego of Post-Oedipalization

jan jagodzinski

Post-ing the Landscape of Post-Oedipalization

In the postmodern world of designer capitalism where the belief and trust in the symbolic order has begun to unravel, we are presented with a confusing landscape of bodies whose modernist signifiers are no longer able to contain the new emergent forms. The question of "youth" has been stretched and twisted in a paradoxical way: on the one hand children are getting "older." They seem to mature more quickly, asked to grow up before their time because of family breakdown; to learn about safe sex because of AIDS, and with the emergence of the new media such as the internet, they are baldly exposed to obscene sides of life that they would usually be confronted with later. Pre-teens are given the right to sue their families; many are latchkey children who look after their younger brothers and sisters as their parents come home late from work. On the other hand, the border between adolescence and adulthood has been twisted in the other direction. Mothers and fathers are in competition with their sons and daughter in trying to remain "forever young." Young men and women seem never to grow-up, as there are not enough adequate jobs in the market place that would enable them to settle down. Many young people drift from job to job, or have several menial jobs together. Re-bounding, coming back home again because it is difficult to sustain an apartment away from parents while working or going to an institute of higher education, is not unusual. The postmodern family no longer raises their children: between school and the newer media such as video games, computer, the Internet, DVD movies, less and less contact time is spent with parents. What has emerged in this twisted and paradoxical space of "youth" is a post-Oedipalization. Signifiers such as "bois" and "boyz" have emerged to mark an arbitrary difference, as well as to chart the emergence of post-adolescent experience that seems to stretch itself to the late twenties to early thirties as a time of unsettled responsibility. "Girlie," "girlz," "gurlz," "grrrls" present us with a similar set of newly emerged

signifiers that play with the twists in youth culture for pre- and post adolescent women.

We have given this brief picture so that we might grasp why piercing and tattooing have emerged within this particular post-oedipal dynamic. The de-centering of the symbolic order has produced a generalized hysteria and obsessive behavior regarding identity. By this we mean it is more and more difficult to know where one belongs in the symbolic order. Being overwhelmed with choice in a so-called liberal society, leaves the young person with no choice, a perplexity that says everything is open, yet not really. Growing up in a modernist context under fairly stable family conditions meant that the role models for middle class youth were rather limited: mother, father, doctor, lawyer. For underclasses it was not even a question of choice. Options were restricted to becoming, for instance, a priest or nun to have a better life. Since, roughly, the '60s this all began to change as the first wave of the feminist movement began, women began to enter universities, television opened up new role model possibilities, and it took longer and longer to become prepared for the job market. These events have only intensified with the emergence of postfeminism, the internet, computerization, and the continued difficulties to find a meaningful job in the symbolic order without the sacrifice of an incubation period to become trained, or to attend a college, university or technical institute.

Consumer of designer capitalism has introduced a new demand; that is, to "Enjoy!" The superego of postmodern industrialization pushes consumption through the hyped senses of sound and vision. It is the aesthetization of the signifier as both a heightened picture and sound which Baudrillard has surrealistically described much to the chagrin of his critics. The music video has emerged as the new postmodern hieroglyph, which operates on digitalized visual effects and synthesized sounds which are proving to be nonsense for an older generation that has not grown up with the new electronic media. They are unable to comprehend its logic. To anchor the hysteria of identity, designer capitalism has concentrated its marketing efforts on brand loyalty. Brand should be understood here on its many levels of meaning so that we may grasp it as a form of tattooing and piercing.

First, to brand something is to leave an identifiable trace of the signifier on the object. Animals are branded, as were slaves, criminals, and concentration camp prisoners. This more brutal and demeaning use of the sign is clearly a subjugation to the Other. One becomes

objectified as a piece of property. No matter how "free" one is (e.g., certain slaves could have the "free run" of the master's house), the brand sign becomes transcendental in its psychic hold of being someone else's property. The brand anchors identity. It is a master signifier to which the wearer has an affective relationship. But, how one interprets such branding has everything to do with the larger socio-historical context. It is not difficult, for example, to believe that a slave was proud to be owned by a particular "generous" owner! As obscene as this sounds to us today, if the concept of being "free" for a particular class, sect or gender is non-existent then the enslavement seems normal. This goes for patriarchal relationships where women are "owned" by men, or the social bond in capitalism. Robert Owen's New Lanark factory, as "free" as it was for its workers, could still be considered a form of enslavement in Marxist terms. The workers were still exploited for profit no matter how sanitary the conditions were compared to other factory owners in eighteenth century England.

Second, there is a marked difference of branding before the ideological establishment of modernity as the "democratic" rule of the bourgeoisie compared to its use during that rule. A number of stages can be identified of piercing and tattooing before the advent of modernism. Tribal societies pierce, cut, and tattoo as a sign of belonging to a transcendental totem animal signifier. Identification in the pagan context means belonging to an intricate order of clan moieties. Boundaries are well defined. Identity is worn on the skin. Under patriarchal religions, the Jewish cut of circumcision was a transcendental sign that divides monotheism from paganism. What was an externalized branded sign of identity now becomes codified negatively. It takes on an "ugly" aesthetic. Christianity does away with the branded cut entirely. The Jewish transcendental sign has now been internalized. There is no need of any display on the body as the Judeo-Christian ideology has "stabilized" the unconscious psyche. The transcendental signifier is God. With modernity, as Foucault so ably showed, the secularization of God takes place through the disciplinary procedures of the body. The body emerges unmarked, unmutated and clean. A classical Greek aesthetic of beauty of the skin-ego shapes the psyche of the bourgeoisie. An external brand remains a sign of disgust.

Third, advertising media of reproduction arose at the turn of the century during the "electric age," marking a historical moment when universal suffrage "democratically" threatened to overturn the

established party conservatism with socialist programs as nations under monopoly capitalism began to industrialize. The marketing strategies of reproduction, paradigmatically developed by advertising as print media, began to influence public opinion and consumerism. International capitalism made possible the amassing of new goods in the major cities of the world: London, Paris, and Berlin. Walter Benjamin's apt descriptions of the way the arcades and department stores in these cities lured the flâneur and the flâneuse into gazing at the goods displayed behind the shopping vitrines are well known. It was a stage of capitalist consumption that has been hyper-aestheticized by the global designer capitalism of the electronic age.

Fourth, the body has begun to mutilate again today into its neo-tribal forms as the internalization of the authority of modernism begins to de-center. The faith in institutions, especially the Law, as parodied by such television shows as *Ally McBeal*, for instance, has not only meant a generalized hysterization of identity, it has produced a hyper-narcissism of the ego. Young people, especially, are affected the most in their search for peer groups—as new centers of authority—to whom they can believe in and anchor their identity. The other response by young people has been an obsessive one. To escape facing the ambiguities and uncertainties of the “New World Order,” they have begun to escape into the obsessive virtual world of video games where they need not deal with the political realities of “real life.” It is much more exciting to live virtually in cyberspace. The proliferation of the music industry (stars and bands) and the entertainment industry (video games, films) offers to both hysterics and obsessives a way to both “anchor” and “lose” their identities. We find ourselves in a socio-historical moment where, just as at the turn of the 20th century, forces of conservatism are hard at work to restore their flaccid Phallus; this is to say, their transcendental impotency through new forms of branding.

Fifth, the skin-ego is Anzieu's term to grasp the way the body mediates into inner and outer life through the porous, membyronic and “warped” surface of the body. We would like to incorporate Anzieu's interesting concept of skin-ego into a Lacanian account of piercing and tattooing to help grasp why the body has become interesting again as a sight/site/cite of struggle and ownership. Lacan presents us with three complexly intertwined psychic registers which help to explain the dynamic between the unconscious and conscious. The Real refers to unconscious body registrations that are both beyond the pre-conscious

imagination and the consciousness of language. We have designated this as "site"; the site of the *inner* body as a topological site. The Imaginary psychic register is the space of fantasy. It is the skin-ego envisioned as a (mis)recognized alter ego that we have of ourselves. It is our *imago* as an ideal ego. We have designated this as "sight"; the sight of the *outer* body, of how we think we like to be perceived. Finally, Lacan's last psychic register is the Symbolic Order, or big Other. This refers to the conscious dimension of language and it includes the structuring of the subject by the discourses of the social order. It includes both the law and the transgression to that law. Hence, an Ego-ideal is presupposed. This Ego-ideal is the superego in Freudian terms, for there is an expectation of how one should behave. In other words, the Law has a demand about it. "Thou shalt do this!" and not that. We have designated this as "cite." For Lacan it is the signifier which is primary. A signifier is, therefore, informed by site/sight. It has an affective loading (either positive or negative, active/ passive, love/hate etc.) in the unconscious and an imaginary gestalt visualized in a scene of fantasy. Fantasy is therefore the outer alter-ego registered on the skin through the inner bodily Real (on one side) and the big Other (or outer-outer body) on the other side. The skin-ego as alter ego of the psychic Imaginary mediates the Real and the big Other or symbolic order.

Sixth, this is the kernel of the theory we will be applying. All experience is registered in the unconscious Real, through the body. The memory of such an experience is then selected on two levels: by a pre-conscious Imaginary—the scene of fantasy which is then *framed* by conscious signifiers. Tattoos and piercing have begun to appear on the body as a skin-ego, as a conversation that a hysterical hyper-narcissist is having with him- or herself in relation to the failed Law today. In other words, we are saying that the reflective mirror of our egos has become questionable. This mirror is being "split" by a "split-screen" of a schizophrenic personality that is in conversation with itself, trying to anchor itself to a small Other, since the big Other is dissolving. The name brand of designer capitalism searches to *addict* the consumer to its product through the body to establish a small Other. Addiction is aimed at the site of the body. It has to become dependent on it. It has to want to come back to it again and again for reconfirmation. It has to be a willing slave to the brand, to do it consciously, even when you are torn not to consume it. Addiction is what structures the pain and pleasure of designer consumerism. In Lacanian terms this is called *jouissance*:

painful pleasure. Such an addiction is governed by the structure of bulimia. Attempting to get “off” the stuff of addiction leads to an anorexia: starvation by young girls, over-training by boys where “Nothing” is consumed and no muscle is gained. On the contrary, the body starves as there is no signifier it wishes to accept. The ideal ego that they strive for can’t be attained. Hence, the alter-ego as skin-ego begins to wither. No longer can the mirror sustain its illusion. The subject disappears into the Real, the vanishing point of the mirror. The anorexic becomes consumed by the Real. Going the other way, the addict “over-does” the signifier; that is, s/he overdoses on it. S/he becomes obese and fat, unable to stop the consumption because a bigger “hit” is required to sustain the enjoyment. The alter-ego is out of control. The mirror keeps getting more and more distorted. The bulimic solution to designer capitalism is binge and then vomit. Addiction leads to a “postemotionalism.” Aesthetization turns into its opposite—anesthetization. We binge on the product, activity, drug of choice, and then we vomit it out or attempt to stop—we become anaesthetized.

Seventh, designer capitalism of branded addiction works on the principle of the drive, or *Trieb* in Freud’s terms. It directly stimulates the body’s cavities—its drives (oral, anal, genital) to stimulate an abundance of jouissance—libidinal pleasure. Its superego demands us to “Enjoy!”, to transgress the Law since the Law itself is failing. We have only to think of the corruption of the CEO’s of Enron to recognize that this is the tip of a much larger iceberg. Without “protection” from such a command one easily becomes addicted—to porn, drugs, food, clothes, extreme sports, and so on. How is such a protection to be had. There have been two major responses—neither of which has anything to do with tattooing and piercing, which is a response to this dilemma all on its own. A return to tradition religions or the search for New Age religions has been one response. The Law is reinstated or made up afresh in a personal religion. The latter is a Madonna-like response where you are into designer religious shopping: a little Buddhism, mixed in with a little Jewish kabbala, topped off with Indian mysticism. The second is that of the cynic as aptly described by Peter Sloterdijk. One plays the system because one knows there is no hope to change its corruption. So, why not just make the best out of it and manipulate its rules? Tattooing and piercing is yet another response: to establish one’s own alter-ego as a form of self-protection. A self-sacrifice of one’s own skin to either belong to a group (postmodern tribe) through the branded

tattoo or pierce so that the hysteria is grounded; or to differentiate oneself from the crowd by becoming an "ugly" body. Abjection, rather than being outside the hegemonic system, becomes simply another form of segregation. This alter-ego is established through a new way to "feel" in postmodernity—through pain. This pain is the site of the Real, so that pleasure comes from establishing a new skin-ego by *consciously* selecting the brand for themselves, "stealing back" the sign, so to speak. In MTV terms, you can become a "Jackass," hooked on your own pain—the direct opposite of the consumer demand to "Enjoy!" Pierces and tattoos begin to "split" the mirror of the ego. They become "events" written on the body consciously, thus marking the birth of a schizophrenic self. Music videos are saturated with young people "talking to themselves," attempting to re-make themselves, searching for protection in an ambiguous unstable postmodern world.

Eighth, the end goal of desire is more and more difficult to define. The "instant" gratification through the drive-addiction is what is continually being demanded by the Superego. Desire always has an impossible time delay about it. Its structure is metonymic. One has to wait and work for its product. There have to be obstacles in the way to overcome and reach the goal. The law has to forbid it to make it attractive and interesting, worth trespassing for. Time is precisely what is done away with in postmodernity. The enjoyment of just the processes is enough. When this happens, most everything becomes reduced to gratification and entertainment. The idea of work that produces a product becomes perverted. All products can be replaced by a newer and better updated model, hence history with the product is not a factor. It is meant to be used up and then discarded—like serial marriages. Our relation to the product is changeable, but not so with the tattoo, and less so with the pierce. The history stays on the body. We live with the permanency of the protective shell that is being constructed. It is a way to anchor oneself as a container that otherwise might be lost in space, or more graphically, lost in the hall of mirrors which the obsessional finds in the on-line computer games s/he plays, moving from one environment to another—endlessly if they so want. We have come full circle to where we began with the question of post-Oedipalization, and now proceed to describe how the skin-ego is altered to establish yet another skin of protection; as an externalization of the ego itself.

The Doubling of the Ego: The Making of the Schizoid Self

An incision is a cut made by an instrument that marks the skin. It opens up the body's inside from its outside, drawing blood as the skin's surface swells and becomes raw. Such a scoring by a knife or a stylus exposes us to the site of the Real, the psychic realm of the unconscious which Lacan claimed to be "beyond" language yet intimately dwelling within it. The Real is precisely where the signifier fails; where the Symbolic Order of language no longer holds. The incision produces a momentary trauma, registering it as a bodily memory which forces a slippage of signs. This cascade of nerve endings begins to change and modify the body's "holographic" skin-ego.

Lacan inverted Saussure's algorithm for the linguistic sign with:

S	<u>Signifier</u>
s	signified

thereby showing the primacy of the signifier over the signified. Here the "bar," as the line that separates the word from its imaged-meaning, designates the impossibility of the signifier ever guarantying a correspondent or non-ambiguous meaning. An abyss separates them. This abyss, one can imagine, is straddled, or jumped over by the constant back and forth exchange between the body's inside and its outside as meaning is mediated through signifiers. As long as that mediation is stable, there is no trauma as such. These body processes happen at sub-conscious levels. But this "barred" line as a "cut" can "split" the signifier and its signified apart. The abyss is exposed. Non-sense is experienced like when an accident occurs or the person finds himself faced in an environment that is totally confusing, in a "foreign" country, for instance. In tattooing and piercing this "bar" as an incision into the skin-ego is consciously allowed to happen. The cosmetic surgeon's scalpel or the piercer's needle force the body's established fantasmatic skin-ego to unravel and come apart. The body's ideal ego begins to slip, twist and contort. In this sense acupuncture is a "mild" form of piercing where the body's nerve routes and electrical flows are redistributed to relieve pain as the morphogenic image (Sheldrake) of the body's memory is re-mapped. Here pain is intentionally summoned to re-member the body; to re-organize its distributive imago. Selectivity on the body, what image is to be tattooed, or what pierce will be chosen

becomes very important—a ritual process which has lost meaning in postmodernity.

By using the flesh as a medium, piercing, cosmetic surgery and tattooing psychically re-map and re-member the body differently, with sexually different bodies requiring different inscriptive tools to etch their different surfaces. Such extreme skin games are an attempt to “answer” the hysterical question of identity in a postmodern world. The tattoo can be the “cut” of belonging to a gang, a cause, a musical group, a Nation, and so on. These tattoos of belonging to the small Other (or ONE), not only anchors them but carries a magical protection as well. In each different case the isomorphism of the inside and the outside of the body image — cathected with libidinal intensity so as to hold the body’s Imaginary and Symbolic psychic together — is opened up, torn asunder, and anamorphically skewed to form another screen-image as a new alter ego. While cosmetic surgery attempts to live up to designer capitalism’s projection of the Ego-ideal, especially for women who strive to reach its “impossible” dimensions, the junkie piercer and tattooist are engaged in trying to ruin this Ego-ideal by becoming an “ugly” body within it. Not to draw its gaze, but to avert it. It is a transgressive stance. How successful they are at this ruination remains an open question since the “freak” is becoming a marketable commodity as well. For them, the body begins its semiological slide into another imaginary when the “bar” of signification which holds the signifier to the signified begins to be incised by the etching tools like the tattoo stylus, the hook, and the spike. Their painful jouissance, however, is not unlike the jouissance experienced by the beauty operation that reorganizes the ideal ego as well. The performance professor-historian-artist, Orlan, whose anti-beauty operations require months of recovery, is paradigmatic of a hysteric who is transforming herself into another woman complete with a new name who is deliberately “ugly.”

The pierced and weltd skin now becomes a palimpsest for “reminding” the entire body of its erotic libidinal governance; i.e., its jouissance of the drives which are pre-Oedipal, pre-linguistic, and prior to desire and the fall into language. Through the drive, the piercer/tattooist tries to “trick” the Real by having the body’s drive circle around a “new” partial object (designated by Lacan as *objet a*) left as a tattoo or a pierce on the body. By so doing, the piercer/tattooist tries to capture and bring back into itself a little “bit” of the jouissance the subject had to give up by symbolically yielding to the disciplinary

actions of the big Other (through the processes of familiarization, socialization, enculturation, and so on). The metal ring or spike, and the tattoo, becomes a self-reflexive reminder of this attempt to re-write the body by tapping into its unconscious Real that has already been shaped by the cultural environment (big Other). This obsessive behavior (to keep on getting more tattoos, to have more pierces) is a way to avoid being swallowed up into the symbolic order. It is an attempt to stave off such a fall into being symbolically named by that order. It is common for tattooers and piercers to claim that opening one's body up to the tattoo or piercing needle is a way of gaining control of the boundaries of the self—reclaiming one's body from medical, scientific, and legal experts, i.e., "civilization," in an act of deliberative, creative, and non-utilitarian (self)penetration as a means of sealing the body as a form of psychic protective armor. To feel in control of one's body is to stave off the passage of aphanisis (the fall into desire and the signifier of the Other to become more "civilized, so to speak). The more common pierces—the ear pierce, tongue pierce, lip pierce, eyebrow pierce, nose pierce, and navel pierce—bodily mark the traces of the lost psychic objects of the dominant senses as the child enters language (the Symbolic Order). With the navel pierce, the trace of the umbilical cord is remembered; with the ear pierce, the fullness of the Mother's voice as Other is recalled; the mouth pierce registers the breast that once belonged to it—perhaps the most primal of all lost objects—and the eyebrow pierce recalls the gaze of the mother when the child imagined that it was whole; finally, the nose pierce recalls the bodily smell of the self and Other as one.

There is a basic constitutive discord between the drive and the biological body. The drives disrupt the instinctual rhythms of the body, and it is for that reason that Freud referred to a death drive. When partial drives come all together we are at the point of death. Freud's death drive stands for the destruction of the symbolic universe; for the replacement of metaphor, reproduction, and pleasure with those of metonymy, displacement, non-reproduction and pain. Body modification trades on this difference. It attempts to establish its protective skin-ego by mediating the death drive by the signifiers it brands on the body and the new w(holes) it creates. Piercing, tattooing, branding, as well as cutting, have emerged from their secretive hiding places on the body (where they weren't meant for public display) to now becoming the visible signs of a response to what is perceived as an

increasing penetration of the symbolic order by corporations (company logos), government, self-help therapies, medicine, and science. This invasion of the private space by the public space has forced the retreat to take place at the sight of the alter-ego as a psychic survival for some.

The Masochism of Skin Play: Performing the Self

As Leo Bersani points out in *The Freudian Body* (55-67), the introduction of large quantities of excitation into the psychic economy has a "shattering effect" upon the coherence of a quiescently cathected ego. The pathology of masochism, for him, is sexuality *tout court* for it disrupts the libidinal and psychic constancy which has been canalized (i.e., encouraged to follow certain established routes) through familiarization, socialization, and enculturation. Hence, when sexuality assumes a perverse masochistic form, i.e., the subversion of the binary opposition of pleasure and pain as pleasure-in-pain, it can dislodge the sex/gender presupposed by a unified biological body, as argued by Judith Butler among others. It should not surprise us, therefore, that transsexual and transgendered bodies who attempt to escape heteronormativity through tattooing, piercing and the surgeon's scalpel masochistically suffer in their attempt to transform themselves.

Masochism, as Deleuze argued, works insistently to negate paternal power and privilege in the sense that paternal power and the law are repudiated, i.e., disavowed. Its acts—with their displays of suffering, pain, discomfort, disgrace and humiliation—are intimately linked to the death drive, as are its spectacularity (exhibitionism) and suspense, given that Lacan's description of the mirror stage underpins all subjectivity. But these performative acts are also creating a split in the ego that is being directly addressed by the performance piece. Such performative acts, following Silverman's provocative analysis of "male subjectivity at the margins," may be characterized as "feminine," eliciting a heteropathic (Scheler), exteriorizing, or "ex-centric" identification with the Other (as spectator). Witnessing is an important aspect of body modification.

All this is dramatically illustrated by a genre of performance art referred to as "hardship art" or "ordeal art" (like Orlan, Bob Flanagan) where the performer's body calls witness to the non-reciprocity of pain and the singularity of an individual's death. Spectators are called on to participate in that "death" which is, from the outset, an "impossible"

undertaking (see Phelan, 152). The unbinding effects of the death drive appear to occupy a space between this "feminine" surrender of the self and a "masculine" response which is ideologically aligned with mastery and control. With the high performance art of body piercing and tattooing, and the repetitive cosmetic surgery by some women, jouissance is sustained by the repetition of the drives which try to annul lack through continuous satisfactions by psychically recovering the impossible "lost objects" (*objet a*). Hence the neologism "hyper-narcissism," or better still, "hyper-eroticism," seems to be an accurate description of the self which has been split into two (a hyper-Ego), given that there is an attempted "return" to libidinous Being. In such acts there is a refusal of desire if desire is read as lack in its Hegelian and Lacanian formulations. In such acts the death drive prevails and the performer faces subjective destitution. Paradoxically, horror and dread which such acts engender intensify the orgasmic body. De-sexualization and sexualization encounter each other in this "psychic black hole," as in the sexual techniques of strangulation and suffocation which are said to increase the felt orgasm of both partners. "Eroticism," as Bataille once said, "is assenting to life up to the point of death" (11). By prolonging the consummation of orgasm and ejaculation associated with "*le petit mort*," the mysticism associated with such ancient spiritual practices of coitus such as kundalini is recalled. This is the experience of "pleasurable torment" as Lingis (55) and Grosz (195) reiterate, where erotic craving is prolonged, extended and intensified to a physiological explosion. Ejaculation and orgasm occur at the precise moment that the suspense becomes unbearable, each partner surrendering him/herself to the possibility of death, as in the final sado-masochistic scene of Pedro Almadovar's *Matador* where the bull fighter and his lover, a woman of comparable machismo, agree to mutually "kill" one another during their last moments of coitus when they both reach orgasmic climax.

Genital piercing of the inner labia, nipples, fourchette, clit hood and the clit itself, and driving spikes through the penis, or wearing penile rings, paradoxically opens up Freud's entropic understanding of the death drive which was grounded in the phylogenetic reproduction of the species. The pleasure-pain of having sexual intercourse with pierced genitals might be interpreted as an attempt for the unconscious to screen the loss of experience in coming to the end of a moment of bliss in sexual intercourse. All the stress is placed on fore-pleasure. In the theorizing of Bersani and Dutoit homosexual emancipatory re-reading

of Freud the relationship between the fore-pleasures of the erotogenic zones that are strongly associated with femininity and perversion, and end pleasures of orgasmic discharge as the ejaculatory climax associated with masculinity, cancel each other out *virtually*. Sexuality becomes the dialectic of seeking the end of pleasure through discharge and then repeating the tension in order to increase it. Erotic craving is prolonged, extended and intensified

All such hyper-narcissism avoids the impossibility of filling the void in the Other, that is escaping the symbolic order by turning pain into a source of pleasure, a *jouissance* felt as a oneness that maintains itself against a myriad of foes. The pierced body, wearing its metallic armor of spikes, rings, studs, hooks, stands as a testament to both a mastery of the body and its "losses." It is a "stupid" body in the sense that there is no "subject" in the drive since this game of being and becoming goes on without language. It is a sadomasochistic pain/pleasure dialogue with the self in the split mirror, at the level of aesthetic bodily play—conducted with erogenous bits and glances between ourselves and others.

The question remains to what extent piercing and tattooing, as forms of self-protection and obsessive behavior that escape the fall into the authority of the waning symbolic order, are in any way politically charged and ethical in their statement? Does the creation of an "ugly" aesthetic ultimately fall into a romantic form of resistance which then slowly becomes mainstream, a passing fad? Moral masochism implies an endless postponement of the moment where suffering yields to reward, and victory to defeat; suspense works to prioritize pain over pleasure, and so further undermines the ego as an experience of pleasure in pain. Does such anti-consumerist behavior, if it can be put in this way, make a difference to social change? Or, has the object become just another marketable brand? These are difficult questions. In a broad sense, it may be argued that such acts are ethical in their attempt to reconnect the sensuality of the body in a postmodern world where the body's objectification is continually mapped and marked by classificatory systems of institutional identification along racial, ethnic, sexual/gendered, scientific, educational, governmental, and managerial trajectories. Yet, the jury is still out as to what extent these are "ethical acts in the Real;" that is, to what extent they are a ground swell to the failing authority of Modernist ideals. The future will tell as this generation struggles to find a way to make a difference.

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Blue Jeans. Alterations of a Thing, a Body, a Nation.

Anna Schober

*Customer: God created the world in six days, and you can't
manage to make me a pair of trousers in six months.
Tailor: But Sir, look at the world, and look at your trousers!'*

"In high school, as it is still the case, while fads and styles came and went, somehow an old pair of Levi's was always right. It wasn't a question of fashion, really – Levi's went beyond that and existed in the realm of what simply was,"² says Judy Manley, a participant in the Denim-Art Contest in San Francisco in 1974. And the writer Wanda Coleman puts the same object in an more erotic context:

'We could all use a little horizontal bop.' Glory sniggered and snapped her fingers. Minette remained uncomfortably silent and I sensed our woman-talk embarrassed her. As if having conjured him up, ahead of us, sitting on the front porch of a single story house, was this muscular mountain of a beautiful young black man. His shoulders were naturally broad, his waist and hips narrow as a weight lifter's. He was thinly clad in a black knit stretch tank-top shirt and blue denims held up by a thick black leather-belt with a brass horseshoe buckle. He was high yellow and handsome. He certainly caught and held our attention.³

Blue jeans here are connected to a male body, slim, trained and half-clothed. The gaze starts with the whole picture, then comes slowly closer, in the end to be caught by the details of the scanty cover below the navel. A 1980s television commercial shows us close-ups of hard-working, tanned sweaty bodies, stuck in tight-fitting jeans, swinging enormous hammers and constructing a huge pair of Lee Jeans which are then collectively, in a festive ceremony, pulled over the twin towers in Manhattan. With their hard and firm bodies the boys constructing these super-jeans are elements of an enormous metallic machinery, while big letters tell us "Lee Original. The jeans that built America" Here jeans are not only connected to a body, but also to a situated body, a city and, at the same time, a whole nation. Pants, men, Manhattan and America became interchangeable links of one chain: these men are their pants,

these men built America, these pants built America, these pants are America, Manhattan is America, etc.

These three small stories of everyday culture, literature and advertising show us that the question of things is inseparable from a question about what they do and what is done with them. Blue jeans appear not as an unalterable material object but as something which becomes visible or palpable only in (or as) its alteration. We are here confronted with sensibilities, desires, wishes or fears communicated via jeans, which are themselves transformed by such a communicative use. In each case, the object is deformed, dislocated from one system to another – and it is by this deformation and by this dislocation that the object's materiality is produced. Such irregular re-objectifications deform the object, however momentarily, into a thing: "The object assumes materiality, as it were, not because of its familiar designated function but during a re-creation that renders it other than it was."⁴

The above-mentioned Judy Manley accentuates this by describing a kind of "remembering-force" connected with her jeans garments: "my jacket is for me a remembering of roots, a chronicle of what has been and who I am . . . I wear the jacket the way one carries the things of yesterday into the now."⁵ We are dealing here with what can be called "histories in things." In describing this "remembering force" Manley is referring to the fact that our feelings, desires, hopes, fears and obsessions lodge in the objects while we are using them. Walter Benjamin describes our modern use of objects in very similar ways. For him, these "histories in things" are, for example, the visible traces of the human act of production and of the historical formation of history, as a history made by man, which normally remain hidden behind the glossy exchange value of objects as commodities; the record of the subjects' structural formation in modernity; the trace of a collective and unconscious Utopian longing; and an impression of social life recorded on the surface.⁶ The term "histories in things" thus refers to a circuit of exchange in which man establishes objects inasmuch as he is established by them. Objects are in this way participants in our inter-subjective constitution of reality. They are a kind of "communicator" of our psychological life, prostheses with which we also show each other that which is secret to us. We have to accommodate our fantasies, fears and wishes somewhere, to place or attach them; on the other hand, these things and places provide "images" without which our intimate life would lack a model. In this way we cover our whole cosmos with

patterns of our experience; it is not necessary for these patterns to be correct, they only have to be "equivalent" or "similar" to the tones of our inner spaces.⁷ Things like jeans might thus be said to serve as the material condition for subjectivity as such. As Kim McRae tells us: "I love my jeans . . . I feel the most comfortable, the most myself when I have them on."⁸ In several advertisements, the blue-jeans producer Levi personalizes American landscapes with slogans like this one: "The West grew up in Levi's" (1950).⁹ And Denna Jones describes her embroidering activity on jeans, portraying a similar continuity between exterior "shell" and interior worlds, with the following words: "I think the work I did on my jeans is just an extension of me; the way I feel and think."¹⁰

Such an intense use of objects as part of the self-culture in modern western societies is something which is itself product as well as agent of historical change. The importance objects have today as conditions of subjectivity and as quasi-religious things is an outcome of a profound change in the history of perception, which, in the end, leads to what we are used to calling "modernity." The notion of "modernity" and "post-modernity" thus concerns not only the transformation that occurs in the social and economic structures of specific time/space entities but also the ways attention is formed and directed and the ways the performances of the self are staged. As Walter Benjamin and Georg Simmel have shown in their seminal works on modernity, and more recently Jonathan Crary¹¹ has demonstrated in connection with their concepts, there was a transformation of perception in 19th century western cities, which was a result of the new emerging media such as photography and film as well as of new forms of labor organization and new means of transport. Thus, perception is not something, ahistorical, given for eternity. Rather, there is a tension between historic change concerning the structures of perception and that which remains always beyond our attempts to symbolize (a traumatic ahistoric kernel which is the real). Modernity is thus characterized by a new form of perception, a persistent eventful subjectivized seeing, which goes together with what has been called the "postulate of visibility."¹²

This "postulate of visibility" that modernity has produced implies that our gaze is attentive to all that is visible – it is at the same time distracted and fixed upon details. Visible details are now seen as evident proof of something lying beyond this world, for example, an inner self – and, more specifically, a deviant or normal inner self, an essential

masculine or feminine, an essential American or barbaric inner self, etc. "Eventually," says Martha Jarosewich, "my shorts became my autobiography in denim,"¹³ while Hopeton Morris, a participant in the 1974 Denim-Art Contest, explains this modern belief in a continuity between exterior and interior in a more detailed way: "Clothing need not only be seen, it can also be heard. It is the extension of the person who is wearing it. It should express that personality in more than one dimension. The ornamentation on the denim in my design creates a pleasurable soft 'chime' sound which creates a reaction in the wearer and in the 'audience'."¹⁴

Almost a century earlier we could already find this model of personality in the U.S. context, for example expressed in Henry James' novel *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), where the very "European" Madame Merle and the very "American" heroine Isabel Archer are having the following discussion: "I know a large part of myself is in the clothes I choose to wear. I've a great respect for things!," says Madame Merle. Isabel Archer disagrees:

'I think just the other way. I don't know whether I succeed in expressing myself, but I know that nothing else expresses me. . . . Certainly the clothes which, as you say, I choose to wear, don't express me; and heaven forbid they should!' 'You dress very well', Madame Merle lightly interposed. 'Possibly; but I don't care to be judged by that. My clothes may express the dressmaker, but they don't express me. To begin with it's not my own choice that I wear them; they're imposed upon me by society'. 'Should you prefer to go without them?' Madame Merle enquired in a tone, which virtually terminated the discussion.¹⁵

Madame Merle seems at a first glance to be the "winner" in this short conversation, also because her argument is supported by the author, whose writing constantly circles around the readability of the world in things. Nevertheless the standpoints of the two discussants are not as far from each other as their words would lead us to believe: because the "naturalness" and "simplicity" so much stressed by Isabel Archer can also show itself – according to the now disseminated "postulate of visibility" – only in visible gestures, for example, in gestures of nonchalance or of the rejection of overcoming conventions and of formalisms or in gestures of a demonstrative "simplicity" – all gestures which will very soon be connected with clothes such as jeans. This

means that Isabel Archer is really the winner of this debate. Because her model of continuity between outside appearance and inner self, which implies the increased importance of the inner world and a devaluation of external appearance, will become predominant in the U.S. at the end of the 19th century and slowly expand itself from there into other parts of the western (and later also global) world.

In modernity, visible details are not only seen as proof of something lying beyond this world, but they have now also become something that triggers memories, reveries and wishes. In visible details we can thus find something that brings us to perceive erratically and persistently and which then ties us again to the image-worlds: "My fiancé was overseas," Denim-Art contestant Louise Coughlin starts her narration about her obsession to embroider jeans with "secret" motifs, on a tour of duty for a year, so, for his birthday I wanted to get him something, that would bring memories of me and home for him. . . . I began embroidering some of his favorite possessions – his ten-speed bike and his Toyota Land Cruiser. Then I embroidered some strange-looking flowers shaped like stars, the word ARIES, his astrological sign, an Air Force plane amid some clouds, an (eye) LUV U . . . But my best idea was the stick figure I formed out of buttons with the name Princess embroidered underneath – his name for me, of course!¹⁶

Such ornamental formations in which we transform our things into messages Jacques Derrida calls "fantasmapoetic processes."¹⁷ With this term he is referring to a discourse of the fetish which is analogous to the religious world. This means that the perception that emerges in modernity now begins to include a creed that no longer refers to a god outside the world but to the tangible things in the world. Something has to be visible, showable and, in the light of day, to be regarded as true – it has to get the "believer" going, that is to motivate and enthuse us as consumers. Martha Green expresses just such a fetishistic loading in the following statement: "I think of my garments as space wear and I can't help feel superwomanish in them. I view my work with cloth and thread as a cosmic adventure: the finished products contain magical powers."¹⁸

Ernesto Laclau demonstrates that in modernity we expose objects and notions in order to indicate a "new," "better" and "fuller" life opposed to the everyday with all its oppressions and compulsions, and he called this process the "production of signifiers of an absent fullness." In the course of this process the object becomes dislocated from its everyday "normalized" use, its meaning is "emptied" and

becomes the incarnation of a more comprehensive, though absent totality. In this way one object can serve as a surface onto which various groups inscribe their conception of a "fuller" life, and the more groups inscribe their wishes, fears, hopes into this very same object, the more it is "emptied" of its "normalized" meaning. As Judy Manley's statement, quoted in the beginning of this paper, shows, blue jeans can thus be brought to signify "pure being": "It wasn't a question of fashion really", she says, "Levi's went beyond that and existed in the realm of what simply was." Like everything else, blue jeans can be brought to function as such a signifier, but at the same time they can – again like everything else – fulfill this function in a necessarily inadequate way: the absent fullness represented by the signifier is constitutively unreachable. On the other hand, every alteration of the object is a misrepresentation, a distortion, but one by which the individual or group producing this alteration gains the fictional coherence of their identity.¹⁹

Laclau also shows that this quasi-religious use of the object should be understood in the context of a history of perception, when he demonstrates that the "production of signifiers of an absent fullness" has to do with an absence of God as a fullness of being.²⁰ In modern secular societies, this fullness is predominantly found among the things in the world, in signifiers. Elements of the visible world now play an outstanding role in this process. On the one hand there is a constant production of images and objects which in this way are brought to represent such an absent fullness. And on the other hand there is an identity-formation of the social and political agents, resulting from precarious and transient forms of identification and dis-identification – processes which occur in a world full of commodities, stars and rapidly changing trends. People create personifications of themselves while dwelling in an object, in a detail or an image.

Blue jeans are interwoven in this history of perception in a particular way. As Daniel Dyan puts it, "*le blue jean est un passeport vers le XXe siècle.*"²¹ On a journey through different social milieus of the western world we can find not only constantly varying alterations of the same object blue jeans, but also a repeated structure of signification – as the previous examples have shown: blue jeans are in different milieus brought to signify a fullness that opposes everything the present lacks. But where exactly in history can we find further examples of such regular-irregular formations of things? Where did such "regular-

irregularities" intrude on the formation of objects to provide some access to what Wanda Coleman has called "a war of eyes"?

One of the first effective places to expose blue jeans to a vast public was cinema. In early feature films made between 1905 and 1916 such as *All on Account of the Milk* (1910), *The Girl at the Cupola* (1912) or *Blue Jeans* (1916/17), we meet these denim trousers medially enlarged, exposed by way of close-ups, contrast, lighting, narration or point of view shots and strictly connected with the leading characters in these films. Such films are closely linked to social-reform discourses, like anti-alcohol or welfare, they were popularizing: all of them set out to show that on the way to an ever-better future it is possible to leave behind the old and to free the "new" by a sudden rupture. These films were at the same time also directed against the opulent historicist European costume-film productions by showing "simple" American characters, "natural" acting and a lot of "modern stuff" now also available in the department stores. Junie, Jack or whatever their names are stand here for "humanity as a whole," and their body language, "natural" gestures and "simple" clothing provide authenticity linking the discourse closely to 'reality'. A detail – the denim trousers – distinguishes this discourse as being "American" as opposed to a general (or "European," "French," "Italian") film discourse, without – and this is important – abandoning its universality. Object, body and nation are linked in these films and the public was medially addressed to identify with this "thing," the character it covers and the stories it was involved in. In the darkness of the cinema spaces, these denim-wearing characters became doubles of the spectators; alongside their story the public could explore their own feelings, bodily sensations and memories.

But the spectators did not become involved in all of these stories in the same way. For them, the confrontation with these filmic worlds became most intense when they were thereby removed in the "lumber-room of one's own self," as Siegfried Kracauer²² once put it. Thus the reception of such films can involve a removal, i.e. what Pierre Klossowski, for example, has called the finding of a "resemblance" and the "hearing" of an "only sign." Everybody thus hears some "only sign" behind the everyday codes, and whether this happens or not depends in the first place on how – through the identity which is guaranteed by such a discovery – we find ourselves resembling it.²³ Films can thus provide their spectators with a commentary on their emotions, hopes

and sensibilities. And the spectators can communicate the intensity thus found again only with the unusual use of objects that indicate a difference of identity to the "others," and a secret complicity to the fellow fans.

Such a finding of similarities and such a falling back into the "lumber-room of one's own self" is thus inherent to the act of perception and leads to constantly changing appropriations of the object referring to unconscious fantasies. In this way more or less spectacular bricolages of styles emerge which use and transform arrangements and gestures found in the media. In style-ensembles of very different social milieus blue jeans are thus brought to incarnate the fullness of a thoroughly "new" life. Men and women of an artists' colony near Santa Fé in the early 1920s, for example, confronting a present full of consumerism, exploitation and alienation, wore blue jeans to indicate the desired "new life" of freedom and democracy expressed in the ruggedness, directness or earthiness of the laborer.

In the 30s and 40s photography became the privileged medium in the dissemination of denim myths, and this can be explained with reference to the employment of then jobless but later very famous photographers (such as Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange or Russell Lee) by the social-management administration of the New Deal such as the *Farm Security Administration* (FSA), the *National Youth Administration* or the *Civilian Conservation Corps*. In these photographs, close-ups of worn and faded denim surfaces, together with the bodies of solitary sharecroppers, migrants or farmers they cover, again indicate "Americanness" and "humanity as a whole" and make evident the "truth" of all the (hi)stories presented along with these photographs in exhibitions, books and magazines. The consumers of these were mostly members of the urban middle class. In looking at them they were able to experience fears, hopes, but also generosity and inner superiority and could thus construe themselves as the "more progressive," "more modern" and "whiter" part of the same nation. These self-presentation-practices do not imitate the "beggars" and "shepherds" of New-Deal governmental photography, but John Wayne and other Hollywood western heroes. So, the younger generation formed motorcycle gangs and dressed in blue jeans, leather jackets and biker caps to show another "new life," one which is full of intensively experienced consumption and friendship between men, and in this way pointed a way out of a

present characterized by widespread shortages and individual competition.

In the 1950s then, blue-jeans-wearing stars such as Marlon Brando, James Dean or Marilyn Monroe crop up in a lot of public sites – in films, fan magazines, or magazines like *Playboy* or the new gay magazines – to popularize another discourse which became socially dominant: the new sexology. Brando, Dean and Monroe demonstrated that sexual drives of “all the people” are “original” and “natural” and tend to seek expression spontaneously, regardless of all the repressive social norms. These films expanded the radius of denim myths widely. In West Germany, but also in Italy, France or Austria, groups of “Teddy boys” now emerge, transforming similarities they found in films such as *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) or *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) in spectacular style-ensembles. And at the same time gay magazines in West Germany, but also in Scandinavia, Italy or France use pictures of denim-wearing boys in tight jeans to indicate a new sexuality, freed of all restrictions. In this was in the 1950s blue jeans no longer built a bridge only between different social groups living in the U.S., but also between the American “new world” and the European “old world.” In all these milieus we thus find a very similar form of signification of the object: wearing these clothes seems to enable the wearer to reject stifling conventions and likewise to demonstrate the “fullness” of a “new” life. This “new” life is, as we have seen, always an individual life, and as clothing is now handled as visible self-expression, it is always the expression of an individual self.

In these reception histories it is also possible to detect the following dichotomy: denim overalls (“Latzhosen” in German) and “waist overalls” (what we call today blue jeans) are linked together in the picture worlds of different historical milieus. Denim overalls are permanently wedded to waist overalls in a relation of inferiority and dependence. They face each other as “soft” and “hard,” “feminine” and “masculine,” “educated” and “educating” bodies, and in this way enter the widespread dichotomous structure of the social imagery of the modern world, where massculture-regression-femininity repeatedly faces modernity-superiority-masculinity.²⁴ In Modernity objects thus became somehow “gendered” by the visual worlds they became embedded in, and once gendered by such an exposition in media or style they could then function again as a material sign for the marking of sexual difference. Typically, the qualities and the status ascribed to the ideal

user (in consumer groups, film and photography) are transferred onto the object itself and the object is then used to transform one's self, in order to become "similar" to the admired star, or it is avoided because of unpleasant gender associations – as denim overalls were long avoided by young white males because of the "soft," "female" and "childish" image associated with them. The same can also be said with reference to the "national" qualities ascribed to an object, which are transferred onto the object itself, which can then be used, for example, to "Americanize" the wearer or user.

Blue jeans appear in all these histories as a garment with qualities of differentiation as well as of unification. This becomes evident when we go back to the jeans-wearing "common men" we found in most of the western social-reform discourses in the 20th century. Because even if these "common men," "common women" or "everybodies" always appear with different faces and under different names, they assume the unchanging function of universalizing the discourse and linking it closely to "reality." The figures tell us: "this applies to all of us" and "this is the reality of the story." These "everybodies" of the western world typically wear blue jeans or denims. It seems that the fading and the bulges of these clothes and the connotative lines between them and the world of labor make blue jeans and denims particularly suited to providing a discourse with credibility. In the styles of various consumer groups, blue jeans assume also the double function of differentiation and unification: they were chosen as an identity-marker and became thus elevated to a larger universe of taste, which in turn was to signal to others "in the know" a refinement, and to the rest a distance. Groups such as the artists colony near Santa Fé in the 1920s, the motorcyclists on American streets in the 1930s and 1940s and the Teddy boys and gay subcultures in western Europe in the 1950s use blue jeans to create styles with which they enter a struggle, not only about seeing and being seen, defining and being defined, but also about the shape of the present and the future.

All this leads to the conclusion that there are processes of articulation between socially dominant discourses and more marginal practices. Objects are a kind of vehicle with which we express ourselves and which we deal with the demands of everyday life. By using them and exposing them we "share" a perspective with these things as we share perspectives with other people. Such a shared perspective is then also something that constitutes us as people. Stuart Hall understands

"identification" as a never-completed process, where there is always "too much" or "too little" – an over-determination or a lack of it but never a proper fit: "Identities are, as it were, the positions which the subject is obliged to take up while always 'knowing' (the language of consciousness here betrays us) that they are representations, that representation is always constructed across a 'lack', across a division, from the place of the Other, and thus can never be adequate – identical – to the subject processes which are invested in them."²⁵ Discourses can address us successfully also by giving us the opportunity of finding spaces where we can find a distance to the actual coordinates of our social existence.

Regardless of this, it is important to recognize that there is not always an equivalence between a social-reform discourse and the practice of the streets. In the everyday productions of the streets blue jeans are only integrated in style-ensembles when they become connected to a "fullness" – wishes, fears, desires, problematizations, disavowals, Utopias, – otherwise they remain outside of any attention horizon. This also means that hegemony is not universal, "given" to the continuing role of a particular class, but has always to be won, reproduced, sustained and is thus a kind of "moving equilibrium," containing relations of forces favorable or unfavorable to this or that tendency. There is always a struggle between different discourses, different definitions and meanings within the realm of ideology and myths, and it is always a struggle within signification: a struggle for possession of the sign which extends to the most mundane areas of everyday life.

But why was it blue jeans and not some other form of clothing that acquired such a prominent role in western representations and self-representations? Why does a "dressing down," a gesture still connected through connotative lines with a world of "hard work," become, in different milieus, a signifier of a "fuller" life? This question brings us back to the history of perception. The importance such figures as the "new common man" and the "new common woman" occupies in modern discourses has again to do with the already described processes of secularization: because the Other, to whom the discourse is addressing itself, is now no longer God or the muse but the anonymous person, "all of us."

Modernity is not only characterized by this new form of perception, that is by a persistent, a voracious eye, but – as I have previously

mentioned – also by a procreation of images, an expansion of representation, which is not so much a “democratization” of the image as a displacement in the gaze-relation of antagonistic social groups: between the bourgeois and the proletarian, man and woman, white and black, etc. As an answer to the threats emanating from the social antagonisms in the U.S. immigrant cities of the 1910s, the denim-wearing worker becomes medially (by criminology, the police, social reformers, poets and filmmakers, for example) transformed into the above-mentioned “new common man” or “new common woman.” Such social imbalances and antagonisms inherent in social formations trigger displacements at an ideological-mythical level.²⁶

To wear blue jeans thus became a gesture which was completely isolated from every historical context but nevertheless indicated meanings such as “hard work,” “democratic” or “American.” In the process of reception of these discourses, these isolated, medially enlarged denim-wearing common men and women then usually became either a mirror of the self of the spectator, i.e. a figure by means of which one can reflect and dream about oneself, or they became somebody essentially “other,” i.e. somebody who is banished to the margins of humanity and with whom the viewing “I” has no business at all.²⁷ In the first case, one can experience the inner self as free, liked, privileged, full of history and connected to the future; in the second case one is marking out a sharp difference – for instance vis-à-vis the fears of social decline, the ghosts of psychological incoherence or the disgust of one’s own self.

This massive representation of a gesture of “rough work” in connection with the self-representations of different milieus, obviously does not mean that these discourses and these milieus accept the rights of the workers more than others or that this is accompanied by greater democracy. What the previous examples have shown is that in the social context of modern cities, where a multitude of implements, tools and forms of work-drill act upon bodies, signifiers are emerging that indicate a “fullness” – but a fullness that is again a fullness of productivity, of work, of fertility, of power and consumption.

Since the late 60s we have witnessed a change concerning blue-jeans-myths. This change announced itself with the emergence of a lot of new commodities covered with blue-jeans surfaces and with an increase in the range of social groups wearing jeans. In the department stores of the 60s, 70s and 80s we can find a lot of goods whose design

(or the design of the package) shows denim myths: for instance the Jeans-VW, "Denim" perfume, "Johnny" cigarette packets (which imitate a jeans-pocket), exercise-books, key-cases and many other things that are quasi-magically transformed into blue-jeans surfaces. At the same time, more and more groups from different milieus are using blue jeans to express their model of a "new" and "fuller" life, such as the feminists, the alternatives, the punks, the Italian city-Indians, or the metropolitan cowboys. Jeans are now embroidered or decorated with appliqués, paintings, patchworks, feathers or other found objects. They are ripped up, faded and combined with garish colors and materials. Through such visible "productive" styles of wearing jeans consumers have been trying to be part of the crowd again – down to earth and different at the same time: "Once upon a time – anywhere, anytime – wearing a pair of Levis was wearing your heart on your sleeve. A pair of Levi's said younger generation, flexible person, still growing – not like your parents. . . . Levi's now must be decorated, made distinctive from other people's jeans and even from your own five-six-seven or more pairs. What is next? Maybe only nudity can reach what wearing a pair of Levi's meant once upon a time, then."²⁸

The enormous success of blue jeans in modernity as a surface on which very different statements against convention and for a ever different "new life" have been able to inscribe themselves leads in the end, in post-modernity, to a crisis of this very concept. Since the 1970s several of these myths have lost their obviousness, become fractured and have sometimes also been regarded with skepticism. Which does not mean that they are no longer also effective: we are still looking out for garments to clothe our longing for a better and fuller life. Maybe in this respect we are in the way of becoming more playful again, less interested in the question of what we "are" behind all our layers, but wishing to use clothes as powerful, temporary and, sometimes, not too serious statements in our everyday performances.

Notes

¹ Samuel Beckett. "La peinture des Van Velde ou le monde et le pantalon," *Cahiers d'Art* 1945/46: 349.

² Quoted in *American Denim: A New Folk Art*, ed. Richard M. Owens and Tony Lane (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1975) 10.

³ Wanda Coleman, "Dream 5281," *A War of Eyes and Other Stories* (Santa Rosa: Black Sparrow P, 1996) 87.

⁴ Bill Brown, "How to Do Things with Things (A Toy Story)," *Critical Inquiry* 24.4 (1998): 954.

⁵ *American Denim*, 10.

⁶ See, for example, Walter Benjamin, "Traumkitsch," *Angelus Novus. Ausgewählte Schriften*, vol. 2 (Frankfurt/ Main: Suhrkamp 1988) 158f., and Marleen Stoessel, *Aura das vergessene Menschliche. Zur Sprache und Erfahrung bei Walter Benjamin* (München: Hanser, 1983).

⁷ On the notion of "similarity" see Pierre Klossowski, *Die Ähnlichkeit* (Bern: Gachnang & Springer, 1986) 13f.

⁸ Quoted in *American Denim*, 73.

⁹ See the exhibition catalogue of the Musée de la Mode et du Costume, *Histoires du jeans de 1750 à 1994* (Paris: Paris Musées 1994-95) 40.

¹⁰ Quoted in *American Denim*, 73.

¹¹ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 1990). See also Slavoj Žizek, "Class Struggle or Postmodernism?," in Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau, and Slavoj Žizek, *Contingency, Hegemony, Universality: Contemporary Dialogues on the Left*, (London and New York: Verso, 2000) 118.

¹² Michel de Certeau, *Kunst des Handelns* (Berlin: Merve; 1988) 320ff.

¹³ Quoted in *American Denim*, 73.

¹⁴ Quoted in *American Denim*, 14.

¹⁵ Henry James, *The Portrait of a Lady* (New York: Penguin, 1961) 213f.

¹⁶ Quoted in *American Denim*, 132f.

¹⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Marx' Gespenster* (Frankfurt/ Main: Fischer, 1995) 249f.

¹⁸ Quoted in *American Denim*, 14.

¹⁹ See Ernesto Laclau, "Why do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics," *Emancipation(s)* (London: Verso, 1996) 39ff.

²⁰ Ernesto Laclau and Lilian Zac, "Minding the Gap: The Subject of Politics," *The Making of Political Identities*, ed. Ernesto Laclau (London und New York: Verso, 1994) 36.

²¹ This process of passing-on is demonstrated in detail in Anna Schober, *Blue Jeans. Vom Leben in Stoffen und Bildern* (Frankfurt/ Main: Campus, 2001).

²² Siegfried Kracauer, *Theorie des Films* (Frankfurt/ Main: Suhrkamp, 1985) 90.

²³ See Klossowski, *Ähnlichkeit*, 13f.

²⁴ On this dichotomy see also Andreas Huyssen, "Mass Culture as Woman. Modernism's Other," *Studies in Entertainment: Critical Approaches to Mass Culture*, ed. Tania Modleski (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986) 188ff.

²⁵ Stuart Hall, introduction, *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul du Gay (London: Sage Publ., 1996) 6f.

²⁶ "As long as there is still one beggar around, there will still be myth," Walter Benjamin tells us in this respect. See his *The Arcades Project*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap P, 1999) 400.

²⁷ On this schematic way of looking at the Other see Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark. Whiteness and Literary Imagination*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992, and Schober, *Blue Jeans*, 248f.

²⁸ *American Denim*, 38.



Picture 1: June (Viola Dana) as *every-woman* in *Blue Jeans* (1917)

© Cinemazero, La Cineteca del Friuli, Gemona, Italy.



Picture 2: Consumed bodies and clothes. New Deal Photography, Marion Post Wolcott, 1939.© The Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, Washington D.C.



Picture 3: The re-discovery of the sexy body: Marlon Brando.
© Filmarchiv Austria, Audiovisuelles Zentrum Wien



**Picture 4: The finding of a “resemblance”.
Teddy-boy and -girl in West Germany.
© Collection Wenske, Hanau, Germany.**



Picture 5: Visibly different. Embroidered Jeans. Disk-Cover, 1970s © archive of the author

An All-American Body? Bruce Springsteen's Working-Class Masculinity in the 1980s

Klaus D. Heissenberger

In June 1984 American rock and roll singer/songwriter Bruce Springsteen released his album *Born in the U.S.A.* Through the huge success of the record—it has sold more than 20 million copies in the U.S. alone (cf. Cullen, *Born in the U.S.A.* 235)—Springsteen became not only an “international superstar” (235) but also a “multi-layered symbol for millions” (Alterman 150)—a national and transnational pop icon that was truly populist in its politics. It was especially Springsteen’s ambivalent Americanness that put him, as Stuart Hall described it in 1986, “both in the White House and On the Road . . . at the same time” (“Postmodernism” 50). In a larger context, the ambiguity of the ‘America’ that Springsteen represented made the icon “a pawn in the country’s ongoing culture war” (Alterman 150). In 1984 and 1985 Springsteen became involved in what can be called, with Lawrence Grossberg, a struggle over “a certain ‘national popular’” in the United States (*Dancing* 9)—that is in a cultural struggle for political hegemony in which the Reagan administration was pitted against its ‘liberal’ opponents and that hinged upon the contested representation of ‘America.’ Springsteen was both a site on which that struggle was articulated and one of the major assets to be gained in it, and the question that different audiences asked was—in the binary manner in which James Kavanagh has pointedly phrased it—“[Is] Bruce Springsteen obviously reaffirming or challenging Ronald Reagan’s version of the American Dream?” (Kavanagh 319).

In the following, I will look at two opposing answers that were given to this question: I will examine how left and liberal cultural critics on the one hand and conservative Republicans on the other interpreted representations of Springsteen’s body in relation to his music as both groups were affirming what they considered the ‘correct’ reading of Springsteen and his politics. More specifically, I will look at how liberal and conservative readings of Springsteen related issues of class and masculinity to make the icon productive for their respective politics in the struggle over ‘America.’

For *Born in the U.S.A.* the icon Springsteen underwent a physical transformation. The singer received, as Eric Alterman puts it, "the full Annie Leibovitz celebrity treatment" (154) for the artwork of the *Born in the U.S.A.* cover. The cover photograph shows Springsteen's "newly tightened rear end," in a worn pair of Levi's, "posed before a waving American flag," the baseball cap that was stuffed into his pocket completing a Springsteen in red, white, and blue. The display of "more media-friendly" (154) looks was not restricted to the symbolism of the album cover. Springsteen had hired a personal fitness trainer and "emerged from the *Born in the U.S.A.* fitness sessions with biceps bulging" (154), signaling a *bodily* transformation that could be widely seen, for instance, in the video for "Dancing in the Dark," in which the new Springsteen for the first time in his career appeared in person, and which received extensive airplay on MTV. In the video, and live onstage, night after night, throughout the one-and-a-half year *Born in the U.S.A.* world tour, Springsteen displayed the muscular body of a white male, clad in "blue jeans, work shirt, and an occasional bandana or baseball cap to absorb the sweat of his brow" (Cullen, *Born in the U.S.A.* 126).

Springsteen's body apparently signified "a vibrant, working-class, white male heterosexuality" (Cullen, *Born in the U.S.A.* 125) that was, as Jim Cullen put it, the "vital center" in a historical moment in which "Michael Jackson's sexual identity was unclear, Prince's eroticism boldly crossed gender boundaries, and Madonna turned femininity into a series of disposable images" (125). It does not follow, however, that the masculine working-class identity of that center was stable, nor that it provided a unified ground for the politics of the icon Springsteen. The "personal and political, psychological and ideological boundary of meaning" (Smith 127) as which the body functions is precarious; it is, according to Judith Butler, "variable . . . , a surface whose permeability is politically regulated, a signifying practice within a cultural field . . ." (139). Stuart Hall's theory of articulation offers a way of understanding how despite that instability, the body yet "serve[s] to function as the signifier of the condensation of subjectivities in the individual" ("Introduction" 11). In Hall's account of the double meaning of "to articulate" (cf. "Postmodernism" 53), identity and meaning are conceptualized as the results of contingent acts of *articulation*, i.e. of moments of both "linking" and "uttering" the historical, genealogical, and discursive formations and the disciplinary practices which shape the

body and through which identity and meaning are constructed on and from the body.

Taking into consideration, then, the significance of the body in examining how conservatives and liberal critics implicated Springsteen in their struggle over 'America,' one needs to account for the different ways in which both groups have articulated in their readings of Springsteen the raced, sexed, gendered, and classed elements and discourses intersecting on his body. And, significantly, one needs to account for the ways in which the discourses of the body were articulated to other elements and discourses to produce the identity of the icon Springsteen. As Lawrence Grossberg points out, "the effects of rock and roll depend upon the fact that particular musical and verbal practices . . . are always received as already having been inserted into a range" of different ensembles and alliances of not only "musical texts and practices"; also "economic relations; images (of performers and fans); social relations; aesthetic conventions; styles of language, movement, appearance, and dance; media practices," and the like need to be considered (*Dancing* 75).² For Springsteen's politics in the middle of the 1980s, in addition to the lyrics of his songs, elements of the singer's biography and his enactment, through his body, of a working-class masculinity were of particular significance. Put differently, the political meanings that liberal critics on the one hand and Republicans on the other made of the icon Springsteen can be understood as two opposing articulations of these elements.

Two years before *Born in the U.S.A.* Springsteen had released *Nebraska*, an album full of narratives of characters driven to desperate acts, such as "Johnny 99." This is the first verse of the song:

Well they closed down the auto plant in Mahwah late that month
Ralph went out lookin' for a job but he couldn't find none
He came home too drunk from mixin' Tanqueray and wine
He got a gun shot a night clerk now they call 'm Johnny 99.

The closure of the Mahwah, New Jersey, Ford factory actually took place and left more than 2000 workers without jobs, and critics were quick to relate the conditions in which Johnny 99 commits his murder—unemployment, debt, and easy access to guns—to the consequences that an economic recession inherited from the Carter administration and Reagan's first massive tax cut had for the American working class at the time when Springsteen wrote and released *Nebraska*. Although, as

historian Alan Brinkley maintains, Reagan's economic and financial program was "not directly to blame for the problems, critics claimed that the administration's policies were doing nothing to improve the situation" (883), and some even regarded supply-side economics and the loss of union power as signs that "all forms of communal, psychological, and political support for workingpeople in Ronald Reagan's America" were being destroyed in the name of 'National Renewal' (Alterman 131). Greil Marcus, in 1982, voiced an opinion that was exemplary of many left/liberal cultural critics' views on Springsteen. He wrote that *Nebraska* was "the most complete and probably the most convincing statement of resistance and refusal that Ronald Reagan's U.S.A. has yet elicited, from any artist or any politician" (236).

Two years later, critics like Marcus read *Born in the U.S.A.* in very much the same manner. Underneath the layer of the album's mostly streamlined and charts-friendly pop music critics detected narratives that could be heard as continuing *Nebraska's* intervention in the official story of the United States—such as the narrative of the Vietnam veteran of the album's title track.

Born down in a dead man's town
 The first kick I took was when I hit the ground
 You end up like a dog that's been beat too much
 Till you spend half your life just covering up
 (Chorus:)
 Born in the U.S.A.
 I was born in the U.S.A.
 I was born in the U.S.A.
 Born in the U.S.A.
 Got in a little hometown jam so they put a rifle in my hand
 Sent me off to the foreign land to go and kill the yellow man
 (Chorus)

In his reading of the lyrics of "Born in the U.S.A.," Mikal Gilmore is exemplary of those critics who regarded the song, and Springsteen, as critical of contemporary U.S. society in general and Reaganism in particular. Gilmore calls the narrative a "tale of outright devastation; a tale of an American whose birthrights have been torn from his grasp, and paid off with indelible memories of violence and ruin" (251). The class aspect of this narrative plays a significant role in critical accounts

such as Gilmore's: The reference to the misguided policy of offering to youthful delinquents a place in the armed forces as a substitute for jail time (cf. Cullen, *Born in the U.S.A.* 95)—the protagonist is sent to Vietnam because he "got in a little hometown jam"—and the socially devastating conditions into which the protagonist was born and which provide the background for his delinquency in the first place—"The first kick I took was when I hit the ground"—can be read as distinct class elements in the song's narrative. So can the narrator's being turned down after his return by the Veterans Administration as well as by potential employers and the fact that a decade after the war, the narrator is still on the road, alienated and clueless:

Come back home to the refinery
Hiring man says "son if it was up to me"
Went down to see my V.A. man
He said "son don't you understand now"

...

Down in the shadow of the penitentiary
Out by the gas fires of the refinery
I'm ten years burning down the road
Nowhere to run ain't got nowhere to go.

Significantly, as this veteran is looking back in anger and bewilderment upon a decade of alienation and frustration, his reflections are located in the 1980s. In 1984, these classed elements of the narrative could be articulated to elements of Springsteen's biography that were still playing an important role in the public image of Springsteen's persona—the singer's own working-class upbringing, with his father drifting through jobs as a factory worker, a bus driver, and a prison guard, being only barely able to support the family. And, importantly, these class elements could be linked to the working-class masculinity signified by Springsteen's body, especially in Springsteen's live shows—some time in the early 1980s, the singer had taken over, as Christopher Sandford has noted, "from James Brown as the hardest working man in show business" (183), and the muscular male body, clad in the working man's outfit, could be seen virtually laboring and sweating every night on stage, in highly intense performances that lasted, as a rule, three and a half hours and longer and often seemed to leave the singer nearly exhausted. At the intersection of the perceived class critique of the lyrics, Springsteen's own class background, and his

repeated bodily enactments of a working class masculinity, the icon Springsteen became representative of the workers themselves who were economically and socially disenfranchised under the Reagan administration. The assertion of masculinity articulated an assertion of working-class identity that was the actual meaning of Springsteen's Americanness—a critical, oppositional Americanness that sought to “strip away that mythic America that was Reagan's image of America,” as Springsteen put it himself (qtd. in Alterman 157).

The conservative conviction that the icon Springsteen represented a Republican version of America was best expressed by the President himself. Seeking reelection in the fall of 1984, Reagan proclaimed at a campaign rally in Hammonton, New Jersey—Springsteen's home state—that “America's future rests in a thousand dreams inside our hearts. It rests in the message of hope so many young people admire: New Jersey's own Bruce Springsteen. And helping you make those dreams come true is what this job of mine is all about”. Reagan's confidence in the convergence of Springsteen's and his own vision of America had been boosted some days earlier when conservative columnist George Will had written a “glowing [concert] review that echoed dominant Republican campaign themes”. Will was fully aware that the intensity of Springsteen's live shows and the fact that, as Will put it, “an evening [with Springsteen] tends to wash over into the a.m.” could be articulated to the 1980s' Republican appropriation of an American work ethic that stressed to the extreme competition and a privatized individualism”. That part of Springsteen's biography that represented the singer as the working-class New Jersey bar band musician who had become a millionaire through hard work and perseverance quite plausibly underwrote that ideology and underscored Will's observation that “flags get waved at [Springsteen's] concerts while he sings songs about hard times. He is no whiner, and the recitation of closed factories and other problems always seems punctuated by a grand, cheerful affirmation: Born in the U.S.A.!”.³

To that affirmation conservatives like Will could articulate Springsteen's working-class masculinity in a peculiar way. Springsteen's physical appearance was strikingly similar to what Lynda Boose calls the masculine “techno-muscularity” of the heroes of popular culture's representations of the Vietnam war that became increasingly popular in the 1980s. Sylvester Stallone's John Rambo comes to mind. *First Blood*, the first film of the series released in 1982, is a fantasy of a

re-staging of the Vietnam war. Rambo returns from Vietnam to be arrested by a local sheriff for vagrancy. His subsequent escape from jail results in a manhunt that involves the arrival of the National Guard and Rambo's burning down much of the town before his superior officer finally confronts him, telling him, "it's over, Johnny." In the sequel, *First Blood: Part II* (1985), John Rambo actually returns to Vietnam to liberate American prisoners of war, who are still held captive in the jungle.

The significance of films like *First Blood* lies in the way in which they were inserted in the dominant discourses of nationalism, patriotism, and of the Republican's 'America' in the 1980s. Reagan himself was "determined to restore American pride and prestige in the World" by arguing that "the United States should once again become active and assertive in opposing communism" (Brinkley 884). Lynda Boose explains that in that political climate the reasons for 1970s antiwar protest had largely "receded into oblivion" (583-584), and residual anti-war discourse had been assigned to a feminized space.⁴ "The symbol-laden depiction of the male body" (590), a "militarized male physique" such as Sylvester Stallone's, played a powerful role in redefining the Vietnam experience and, through it, 'America.' Revisiting, on screen, the forests and rice paddies of Vietnam, Rambo's all-powerful masculine body promised to undo the loss of the war and to save American self-recognition and self-respect, quite in the sense of Reagan's National Renewal.

Springsteen, in turn, could literally be *seen* feeding into that fantasy in the shows of the 1984/1985 tour, as he performed "Born in the U.S.A." standing against a huge American flag that was draped as the background of the stage, his body—as Springsteen seemed to be embodying the first-person narrator of the song—a prime specimen of the muscular American male, with a clenched fist stretched towards the sky for a chant of "I was born in the U.S.A.". In the song, just as in films like *First Blood*, the failure of the Vietnam War—that which alienates the American veteran from his country when he returns home—was not so much the fact that the war was an ultimately unjustifiable imperialist project but that the American people failed to support their troops. The refusal to accept the consequences of that failure, which is voiced by the veteran in "Born in the U.S.A.," *could* in fact be interpreted as an unambiguously proud declaration of his Americanness—in fact, in an interview in 1986, Springsteen stated that

"Born in the U.S.A." "has an enormous amount of pride in it; pride in being an American" (*Glory Days*). Even though in Springsteen's view, this pride is tainted by the fact that "the guy . . . is just proud he lives, he's survived," this "shameful part" of the song was easily "missed," as Springsteen explained, by his audience (*Glory Days*). The pride in being alive, in America, in the 1980s, could easily be constructed as the same kind of pride that the national fantasy embodied in John Rambo delivered for a mass audience. Springsteen's body was thus made productive for the conservative Right as the assertion of an aggressive working-class male heterosexuality could be articulated with the narrative of the veteran who was used by and then alienated in his home country. His working-class masculinity produced Springsteen as an icon that could be credibly inserted into the Republican political project of reorganizing pride in 'America' through the reaffirmation of a classed masculinity.

The question of what constitutes the 'correct' reading of the icon Springsteen, then, can only be answered in specific contexts. As liberal critics on the one hand and conservatives on the other answered the question whether Springsteen was reaffirming or challenging Ronald Reagan's 'America' in their respective contextualized, interested readings, the different meanings of Springsteen's identity they articulated were also positions in a struggle over Springsteen's body. This struggle aimed at determining and defining the politics of the "vital center" of the white working-class masculinity that Springsteen's body signified. It was, to a considerable extent, the inherent instability of the body as a site of cultural inscription that helped to produce the political ambiguity of that center; that prevented Springsteen's politics from being pinned down all too early to either of the opposing camps' positions; and that made Springsteen's Americanness, in the mid-1980s, indeed cut two ways.

Notes

¹ Grossberg reads Antonio Gramsci through Stuart Hall, who characterized popular culture as "one of the sites where [the] struggle for and against a culture of the powerful is engaged: it is also the stake to be won or lost in that struggle. It is the arena of consent and resistance. It is partly where hegemony arises and where it is secured" (qtd. in Grossberg, *Dancing 7*). Grossberg's project is "to understand how the popular defines at least one set of the conditions of possibilities for the increasing appeal of a new conservatism" in the United States (9). I will attempt to locate my analysis of the politics of the icon Bruce Springsteen in the mid-1980s in the space that this reading of the national popular opens up.

² Grossberg calls the ensemble of these elements and their interrelated functions "apparatuses" (cf., for instance, *Dancing* 75). While attempting to develop fully the consequences of Grossberg's argument about the functioning of different rock and roll apparatuses would go beyond the scope and purpose of this paper, I nevertheless think that it is necessary to heed Grossberg's warning that the politics of rock and roll must be understood not only as being grounded in its musical and textual practices, but as effects of specific articulations of elements that are outside of the music and the lyrics, and to which the notion of an "apparatus" calls attention.

³ All Will quotations are taken from Cullen, "Springsteen's Ambiguous Musical Politics", 1.

⁴ As Boose explains, in the 1980s residual antiwar discourse and memories of the Vietnam war as an imperialist enterprise were increasingly understood as "a perceived threat to masculinity" that in turn came to underwrite the "revalorized aggressiveness of the national character" under Reagan (587). Boose makes an elaborate argument how the masculine rhetoric "reconfirming the ethics of 'getting tough,' 'playing hardball,' 'being a winner,' etc." (586) that film fantasies such as *First Blood*—and conservative politics—proposed, contributed to reassert Americanness through the assertion of masculinity.

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The Monster Within: Demonic Images of Food, Bodies and the Desire to Eat in Recent American Literature on Eating Disorders

Greta Olson

The first subject that needs to be addressed is how do the various parts of the title of this essay relate to each other. You may well ask, "What in the world do eating disorders have to do with monsters and recent American literature?" In the past decade more than ten novels, several literary autobiographies, and innumerable poems have been published or posted on the Internet about the experience of having eating disorders. These literary texts describe the experience of anorectics, that is women who remain at less than 80% of normal body weight for their height and are enormously frightened of being "fat" or gaining weight; such texts also depict the experience of bulimics, individuals of "normal" weight—overwhelmingly women—who binge on enormous quantities of food and then try to offset the effects of their excessive consumption by purging, by forcing themselves to vomit, by using laxatives in order to defecate, or by starving themselves or exercising excessively. Still a less well-known eating disorder is described in literary accounts of eating disorders, called the binge-eating disorder, in which normal weight or overweight individuals consume huge amounts of calories in brief periods of time but do not purge actively or passively—by exercising abstemiousness—afterwards. Yet other types of eating disorders have been documented recently, including activity anorexia and night-time eating syndrome.

Describing these phenomena in literary terms is the poem "Howl" by Heather Stephanson, which owes its title and form to the beat poet Allen Ginsberg's poem of the same name from 1956:

Howl

I.

I saw the best bodies of my generation destroyed by self-control, starving,
determined well-healed,
jogging through suburban streets at noon looking for a set of scales,
slimhipped sweethearts burning for the ancient physical connection to the

lean discipline of the empty dawn,
who affluence and goals and perfect and nude nibbled celery before full-lengths
floating through remembered recipes contemplating eggs,
who bent like nun nurses over pure white porcelain to count pieces of carrot in a
gastric sea,
who passed through universities with mute clouded eyes hallucinating hamburgers
and makeovers among the arbiters of success
who picked kernels off rice cakes, doled out curds of cottage cheese, chewed
50 times a side,
who spent lunch money on cigarettes and clothes to shrink into,
who deathgripped dance bars, whispering the mantra "I'm so fat I can't do this
I'm so fat I can't do this I'm so fat I can't do this" until their thin blood
swished to the beat,
who stepped like shy antelope on swollen toes before Misha's framed inscrutable
stare,
who clenched and released their buttocks while riding the bus or purgatoried their
torsos night after night
with movies, with candy, with popcorn, fingers and throats and endless abdomens,
calorie clouds of refrigerators, kitchen white knives hospital dawns, Metamucil and
raw fruit bursting over the sink, drugstore families and aspirinhead denial
inches pounds cholesterol counts and RDAs for pigs in the soap opera
afternoons, poolside calculations and harsh daughter's control of mind,
who sized up every woman they saw, x-ray eyes blazing through the subterfuges of
bold prints and vertical lines,
who mixed powders in shotglasses of blue milk, popped pills and gloried in the
banquet,
who leapt from bed to toilet to scales dropping their nightgowns snipping nails and
shaving legs to make the wand wave lower,
who meditated on glasses of stylish sexy water and eight times a day drank the
cleansing draught,
who weaned themselves on the wizard's tit of sugarfree lifesavers,
who rocked 'til they dropped at the dance-a-thon in ecstatic communion with
dissolving thighs,
who tweezered pubic hair, toothpicked vomit from braces and walked the beach
once a year in throat-to-ankle raincoats,
who treadmilled their minds into lockstep obsession pared themselves like potatoes
and apologized for every inch of earth they occupied,
who struggled with snaps in department store dressing rooms as the discreet and
polished toes of size 2 salesladies clicked up and down the numbered aisles,
who served seven-course meals on fine china while violins oozed butter in their ears
and fat-fingered CEOs reached for non-existent asses,
who broke down crying in white gymnasiums naked and trembling before the
machinery of other skeletons,
who scribbled "my body, my choice" on the stretcher sheets in their own blood the
stink of rotting cells and stomach lining leaking from their lips,
who hid huge weights in rectum and vagina to show the smocked irrational judges
how much they'd gained,

who yanked IVs and bubbling nostril tubes with chopstick arms in the fluorescent
stroke of midnight,
who corseted their skulls with celluloid and silicon,
who dried up like apricots, asexual Alices singing happy good-byes to their monthlies

ah, Mandy, Bella, Rosalie, while you are not safe I am not safe

You chose from the few roles available
That of the most perfect subject for poetry (a beautiful woman dying)
Played it to perfection so the audience gasped.

*Were we right? Is heaven clouds of whipped cream?
Are you angels lighter than air?*

Stephanson's poem reworks Ginsberg's "Howl," a prophetic lament against the destructive materialism of his age and a personal appeal to the souls of lost friends. In so doing "Howl" stakes a claim for the place of writing on eating disorders within the literary tradition. The poem makes other intertextual references, including the line: "Asexual Alices singing happy good-byes to their monthlies," which points to the protagonist of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865). The original Alice descends through a rabbit hole to enter an upside-down world of magical foods, talking animals and playing cards just as the current anorectic lives in a profoundly unbalanced world. "[S]inging goodbye to their monthlies" describes the phenomenon of amenorrhea: Due to their extraordinarily low body weight, anorectics stop ovulating and menstruating altogether. The lines from the end of the poem: "You chose from the few roles available / That of the most perfect subject for poetry (a beautiful woman dying) / Played it to perfection so the audience gasped" allude to E.A. Poe's poetic idealization of dead woman. In his essay "The Philosophy of Composition" the poet wrote: "'When it most allies itself to *Beauty*: the death then of a beautiful woman is unquestionably the most poetical topic in the world, and equally is it beyond doubt that the lips best suited for such topic are those of a bereaved lover.'" Consider the tradition of Poe's Annabel Lee, Shakespeare's Ophelia, Cordelia, and Desdemona, Tennyson's Lady of Shalott: Beautiful women are often depicted in literature as well as pictorially, for instance by the Pre-Raphaelites, as anticipating or experiencing death. Indeed, in texts about anorexia, narrators frequently adopt this image of woman as a dying swan to portray themselves as

perfect, thin statues or ballerinas: They understand their skeletal forms and starving themselves to be art forms.¹

Like the original "Howl," Stephanson's reworking of the poem presents its reader with a series of horrible surrealistic images. In this case the images concern how women torture themselves with food abuse and destructive bodily practices as well as how they are in turn subjugated by images of how they should look. "Howl" includes depictions of average dieting women and girls. The poem describes how girls use their lunch money for school to buy cigarettes as a method of appetite suppression. Furthermore, women—the poem tells us—chew 50 times on each side of their mouths, drink 8 glasses of water a day, and employ any method to lose weight. Drinking protein drinks rather than eating food, exercising excessively, treadmilling, performing ballet exercises, and apologizing "for every inch of earth they occupy" belong to some of the ways women control their weight.

Within this context I want to mention one explanation of eating disorders that says that as women have gained economic and political clout in Western culture, this gain has been offset by an increasingly difficult-to-achieve standard of how they must look.² At least in the States a woman may be a nuclear physicist, yet if she does not conform to a standard of looks (a standard of slenderness) she may not be considered successful. Or, her achievements may be viewed as compensations for her lack of success with regard to her personal appearance.³

The general obsession with maintaining a certain standard of appearance is further underlined by the poem's images of the women "who corseted their skulls with celluloid and silicon." Women have recourse to surgery to plump up their lips or cheekbones. Like the painful removal of bodily hair ("who tweezered pubic hair") and like extreme eating habits, plastic surgery belong to the repertoire of behaviors many American women feel compelled to practice in order to be attractive enough.⁴

"Howl" also describes a sense of competition commonly felt by women with regard to weight and size. The saleslady in her size two shoes represents an intimidating standard against which the woman in the dressing room feels obliged to measure herself. The saleslady "click[s] up and down the numbered aisles," while the woman in the dressing room struggles to force herself into too-small clothes. This scenario resembles a prison scene in which the prisoner suffers from the

constant surveillance of the warden, while the emphasis on numbers here indicates that the woman in the dressing room is being made to conform to standardized versions of appropriate size.

Women 'size each other up' through whatever clever clothes they are wearing to determine each other's actual body size, as the line "x-ray eyes blazing through the subterfuges of bold prints and vertical lines" indicates. A whole paradigm of female perfection is alluded to: Woman should be size two, hairless, and perfectly sculpted. Any means is employed to achieve this standard.

More alarming than the image of average dieters the poem presents are its depictions of anorectics and bulimics. We read about women using knives to cut themselves. Self-cutting or "delicate self-mutilation" (Cross) has a high coincidence with eating disorders and is an overwhelmingly female disease: For the most part young women cut themselves on their arms, hands or wrists, and then "take care" of their wounds in an elaborated, ritualized manner. Whereas anorexia is referred to as the disease of the 70s, and bulimia as the disease of the 80s, self-cutting may be the disease of the 90s and the beginning of the 21st century. The poem speaks of bulimics who vomit Metamucil (a laxative) and fruit all over their sinks, about girls—we know they are girls because of the braces on their teeth—who use tweezers to remove the residual vomit from their purging sessions, and severe anorectics whose fear of weight gain is so enormous that they hide weights in their orifices so as to appear to have gained weight and not to be fed intravenously after they have been hospitalized.

Hopefully, the question of what eating disorders have to do with literature has been answered by this analysis of "Howl." What eating disorders have to do with American culture and with monsters remains to be addressed. In reading texts such as "Howl" I take a cultural studies approach to literature. Versus New Criticism, formalism, or deconstruction, cultural studies understands literature to be embedded within the world out of which it was written and in which it will be received and read. Practitioners of cultural studies do not regard literature as separate or specialized writing with its own particular kind of language, field of reference, and form of being. Instead, cultural studies examines how texts reflect attitudes about—or, to use the much more political word, ideologies of—gender, class, and race. This method of reading takes as a given that what we think of as being 'literary' involves value judgements about what our dominant culture

considers to be valuable. And these value judgments alter over time. For instance, for modernists such as T.S. Eliot or Ezra Pound, literary value was discovered in the universal nature of a text and its lack of personal self-references; in the Victorian era, by contrast, good literature was supposed to teach, be morally useful and religious. Current standards for what makes literature 'good' reflect prevailing societal values. Hence literature reveals a great deal about how a culture lives and thinks and, simultaneously, reflects and creates that culture.⁵

What then can we read about American culture in "Howl"? It has become something of a media cliché to think of eating disorders as temporary problems of rich adolescent white girls or glamorous celebrities such as Jane Fonda, the late Princess Diana (both bulimics), or Princess Victoria of Sweden (a recovering anorectic). Many people think of eating disorders as only anorexia. Traditionally, eating disorders have been explained using medical or psychological models.⁶ At the beginning of the 20th century, Sigmund Freud diagnosed anorexia as an arrested stage of psychosexual development in females, typified by a fear of pregnancy and an unwillingness to be regarded as adult women; later, system therapists such as Mara Selvini Palozzoli in Italy and Hilde Bruch in the U.S.A. considered the eating problems of an individual girl to be symptomatic of the pathology—that is, the unhealthy psychological interaction—of an entire family: The illness of the girl represents the weakness of the entire family, which has to be treated and healed as a system. More recently, another explanatory model understands eating disorders as cultural illnesses. Anorexia, bulimia, and binge eating manifest larger societal problems and tensions, which are literally written on the body of sufferers (see Turner 114). Eating disorders then reveal illnesses in American culture. These illnesses concern class and gender distinctions in particular.

As "Howl" attests, eating disorders have a class component, because weight is a class marker in the United States. To the degree that class is synonymous with race there, eating disorders have a racial aspect as well. Obesity is over-represented in the Mexican American, African American and Native American populations as compared to Americans of European descent (see Foreyt 47). Indications of the class nature of eating disorders can be seen in "Howl" in the lines "starving, determined well-healed, / jogging through suburban streets at noon." The poem features university-educated women who have the means to attend ballet classes, sit by the pool in the afternoon, serve elaborate

meals, and who can afford plastic surgery. The poor in America, whether rural whites or inner-city African Americans, are disproportionately overweight. Franchises cater to the inner-city poor, who may eat two out of three meals a day in McDonald's or similar fast-food restaurants. Often low-income minority urban dwellers have little access to healthy food alternatives—reasonably priced shopping markets must be driven to; fruit and vegetable markets closer at hand are prohibitively expensive (Crister). Being thin or—using the choice adjectives since the exercise-wave of the 80's—"lean," "slim," "fit" or—with the new emphasis on muscularity—"toned" is then a prerogative of the rich in America, who have access to exercise and to healthier, more expensive foods. A cultural cliché involves the idea that one cannot trust someone to control a budget or run a staff if she or he cannot control their contours. By the same token, bulimia and anorexia are disproportionately represented in the upper-middle-class white population of America, in which being thin is a more powerful part of the cultural ethos. The more socially important it is to be thin, the more individuals will resort to extreme methods to achieve this standard.

Let me qualify what I just said by reporting that eating disorders are also strongly represented by immigrant women, who seek to assimilate themselves in the States or Britain—where studies of this have been done—by adopting the cultural values of their new target culture. Evidence suggests that as both unhealthy American eating habits and beauty standards become global standards, eating disorders will increasingly affect women in so-called third-world nations.⁷

We Americans—both men and women—have grown steadily fatter during the past century. More than half of the population can be considered obese, and this number is on the rise (Gibbs). Even since 2000 the rate of overweight adult Americans has risen by 9 percent (see Patz 72). A number of factors account for this, including our increasingly sedentary life-styles and the break-down of more formalized eating rituals—that is the move away from eating in family or group situations at set periods of the day to snacking on the run at any time of day or night (see Falk 29-35). Furthermore, dieting has become a form of ersatz religion: Americans eat excessively and promiscuously and then expiate guilt for consuming too much by imposing periods of abstinence upon themselves.⁸ However, standards of beauty, particularly for women, have gotten steadily thinner. Studies of Miss America contest winners and *Playboy* bunnies demonstrate that

during the 1950s representatives of these two different models of desirable femininity might have been around 5'6" and 150 pounds; they are now more likely to have the proportions of professional models: they are 5'8" or more and weigh less than 110 pounds (see Seid 3-16). Hence the beauty stakes have gotten higher; it is much harder for the average woman to conform to the beauty standard, so her means of trying have become much more extreme. To encapsulate the argument, eating disorders begin with diets (see Habermas 153). Restricted eating leads people to have obsessive thoughts about food—as studies of starving individuals have shown. Most individuals react to periods of dietary deprivation by bingeing; this makes many dieters feel guilty, which then leads them to be extremely prohibitive about their food intake again (see Zerbe 251-254). A vicious circle ensues. For this reason, many anorectics become bulimic, whereas few bulimics develop anorexia. Only few individuals can starve themselves indefinitely.

However, far more than a class issue, eating disorders represent a gender problem. More than 90% of those who suffer from bulimia and anorexia are women. And the incidence of eating disorders reflects larger societal trends. Over a half of American women diet at any one time (see Rand and Kuldau 706). A recent *Psychology Today* study ("A Very Revealing Picture") demonstrates that two-thirds of the women respondents feel unhappy about their weight and a half of these women would trade several years of their lives in order to be thin. This is not just a question of vanity. Personal appearance is arguably increasingly important in an aging society in which the presentation of the self is of paramount value. Yet women are discriminated against more than men for being 'fat'—I use this negatively-connotated word consciously because it has become a term of abuse—or even slightly overweight. Thin women tend to 'marry or mate up' in American society, and obesity is correlated with downward social mobility. Studies demonstrate that a fat woman is less likely to be hired for a job, admitted to a college or a sorority than a thin one with the same background and qualifications (see Sobal 75, Rothblum 53-76). Hence the problems eating-disordered women have do not just represent the preoccupations of a small minority, but represent exaggerated versions of problems in American culture at large. Many, if not the majority of women, feel threatened by food, worried about their weight, and insecure about their identities in relation to their weight. Fearing food has become ubiquitous to American culture.

Finally, I want to treat the question of what eating disorders have to do with monsters? In the texts I have studied food, the desire to eat, and the body are repeatedly portrayed as fiendish demons out to destroy the self. In a poem by Kathy Anderson called "Surrounded," the speaker describes herself as going for a walk in the woods; she says "Even outdoors / she sees food everywhere" (161) as though food were encroaching upon or threatening her. Alternately, food stuffs or the urge to eat are portrayed as diabolic: One anorexic narrator describes the potatoes she is served in the eating disorders unit of a hospital as wanting to kill her (see Shute 126). This sense of being threatened by food and appetite is not isolated to sufferers of eating disorders. Normal dieters who narrate poems on eating obsessions speak of similar fears. Even women who correspond to our cultural ideals of feminine perfection, such as the supermodel Claudia Schiffer, report feeling that they are being "attacked by food all the time" (O'Connor 29).

Whereas food itself takes on an element of the frighteningly demonic, the desire to eat or binge becomes synonymous with monstrosity. This is evident in a passage from the following text taken from an Internet web site on eating disorders called "Eat to Live or – Live to Eat":

... The beastly, horrifying monster speaks to me with
Incomprehensible words.
The beast is a big black hole which fills me up.
It makes me dirty and disgusting.
I fight towards the monster and it against me.
The struggle feels enormous and lasting.

The speaker understands herself to be at war with the monster inside her against which she "struggle[s]" and "fight[s]." Her desire to see herself in contradistinction to her desire to eat is signified by her paradoxical description of the monster's spatiality. This "beast" is simultaneously a vast black hole or abyss with no physical substance and something that fills her up and dirties her: She depicts herself as both surrounded and invaded by this foreign entity. By associating her need to binge with a subhuman monster or beast, the speaker ascribes alterity to her own motivation to eat. Increasing the speaker's sense of foreignness in relation to her uncontrollable desire to eat, she associates "[i]ncomprehensible words" with this monster. The monster or beast she describes is overwhelmingly large, all powerful, and fundamentally

different from the speaker's sense of her desired identity. She disassociates her urge to eat by assigning negative qualities of monstrosity, foreignness, and revulsion ("dirty and disgusting") to it.

Similarly, the beginning of another poem about bulimia called "The Bulimic Experience; Today Will Be the Last" associates bingeing and the attendant feeling of fatness with bestiality and monstrosity:

Sit and wallow.
Now get up to walk to the mirror and
force my eyes upon the raging beast
who has crawled into my soul.

Here the speaker brings together images of her body and self with a pig, who "wallow[s]." The mirror reveals a "raging beast" which in reptilian fashion has "crawled" into her self and left her porcine and horrible to herself. Again this poem reveals the speaker's need to assign otherness to her despised pig-like body as well as the force that she sees as being responsible for her state, the monstrous beast within her.

Images of monstrosity are not particular to poems about eating disorders. In novels about anorexia such as Jenefer Shute's *Life-Size* (1992) the eating-disordered body is associated with a horrid demonic entity:

I stopped going back to my parents' house for the summers, too, and for Thanksgiving, because I couldn't trust myself around all that food. I lied and said I had a job, an internship, a research project. They seemed relieved and so was I, never knowing what would possess me on any given day. How could I appear among people as the ravening monster I truly was—huge, with a crammed, bloated maw, hands full of food, half-chewed matter drooling from a never-empty mouth, lumbering insatiably towards everything, everyone, in my path?

Godzilla, King Kong, a mutant monster from the sewers. (175)

Here the body appears to the narrator as "ravening" and "huge." This type of hyperbolic writing about exaggerated images of the human body is familiar from grotesque fiction. In grotesque works, body parts are enlarged and humans are compared with animals, vegetables, and otherworldly entities. The narrator of *Life-Size* likens herself both to an animal when she refers to her "bloated maw" and to a subhuman monster, who lacks the civilizing principles of eating etiquette, when

she describes her “hands full of food” and her “never-empty mouth” full of “half-chewed matter.” She envisions herself as a less-than-human “mutant monster from the sewers.” Food here takes on an alien aspect as well: “matter” shares nothing with attractive or mouth-watering images of food.

Significantly, the monster is characterized as moving “insatiably towards” what it wants to consume, “everything, everyone.” Notably, the adjective “insatiable” is now used to describe the appetite for food rather than for sexuality, an interesting turn in what we think of as being excessive or errant behavior. I would invite the reader to examine his or her own thinking about ‘lax’ or ‘bad’ behavior. What do you condemn yourself for more? Is this more for sexual deviations—whatever this may represent in your individual life—or for excessive eating and drinking and being lax about your exercise program?

Notions of what constitutes lust have undergone change. In a society which places a premium on function and self-control—with regard to work and bodily discipline—sex is regarded as a form of performance: it burns calories and requires an optimally-trained body in order to be carried out in what is considered to be an aesthetically pleasing manner. By contrast uncontrolled eating now represents messy self-indulgence.

The collocation of the sexually connotated desire to eat with the monstrous body can also be found in Marya Hornbacher’s autobiography *Wasted: A Memoir of Anorexia and Bulimia* (1988), which describes the protagonist’s more than decade long struggle with eating disorders. Here she describes a protracted week-end binge at her parents’ house:

In the house I dump the bags on the kitchen table, the floor, the counter, and clear a space for myself. I keep eating. I mix up blueberry muffins and let them cook while I suck down everything in sight, run to the bathroom, desperately wanting to rid myself of the feeling of fullness, throw up, run back, frantic to get the fullness back. I stand there eating until all the food is gone. All of it. Gone.

I look up from the empty bowl in front of me and catch sight of my bloated, hideous face reflected in the dark window over the sink.

I lean down and throw up. (221-222)

Words such as “desperately,” “wanting,” and “frantic” demonstrate the protagonist’s sense of being out of control of her actions. Note again that these words have Gothic overtones as well as sexual ones. (Think of descriptions of erotic scenes in which the female protagonist is “desperate,” “wanting,” and “frantic” for sex.) Here sexual desire for the touch of flesh is replaced by the urge to consume blueberry muffins. When the narrator recognizes herself by catching sight of herself in the window in the kitchen that functions as a mirror, she experiences a moment of horror: Her face is bloated and hideous; it bears no resemblance to her normal thin self. Again the embodied self is depicted as monstrous and horrifying when it is in the process of bingeing. The narrator experiences a moment of shame or remorse as individuals are often described as having after they have had deviant sexual experiences.

While surveying prose and lyric treatments of eating disorders I found that the image that occurs most frequently is that of the monster who overwhelms the speaker or narrator and forces her to eat. Occasionally, this monster appears as a seductive Gothic hero who tempts the woman to eat. More often, the monster appears as malevolent and force feeds the woman. Commonly, the monster is depicted as male. This may represent a comment on the paternalistic aspects of a culture that enforces female submission with unrealistic standards of how women should look. Conversely, describing the monstrous body or desire to binge as male may reflect speakers’ needs to describe their eating-disordered selves as being as different from their (female) non-eating-disordered selves as possible.

I want to present some preliminary explanations of the need to other the body, the desire to eat, and food as monstrous in literature on eating disorders. This tendency can be understood within the context of the *doppelgänger* motif in literature, within the context of post-colonial theory, and as a feature of a culture with a lack of an integrated notion of the body and the mind.

Depicting the desire to eat or binge as a demon or monster is analogous to the *doppelgänger* motif in turn-of-the-century British fiction such as Robert Louis Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891)—or even earlier in Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein, or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818). In these texts the self is experienced as profoundly divided and dichotomous. Criminality and deviance are hidden from the world of

outer appearances and show up in the monstrous form of Mr. Hyde, the revealing portrait of Dorian, and the creature that Victor Frankenstein produces. Similarly, the desire to eat is experienced by narrators of texts on eating disorders as so horrifying that they need to divorce it from their experience of their preferred images of themselves as thin, controlled individuals. These literary images anticipate Freud's analysis of repression as well as the Lacanian and feminist treatments of othering that have come after Freud.

Dorian Gray's final confrontation with his tell-tale portrait resembles the moment of horrified self-recognition eating-disordered women have when they look at themselves in mirrors. Dorian's portrait has visibly recorded the life of debauchery he has lead whereas his face has not aged or altered at all. On looking at the portrait Dorian thinks: "The thing was still loathsome—more loathsome, if possible, than before—and the scarlet dew that spotted the hand seemed brighter, and more like blood newly spilt" (261-262). Similarly, the speaker of the poem on bulimia and the narrator of *Wasted* experience their visual selves as deviant, monstrous, or animalistic ("wallow") when they recognize their depraved hidden selves in the mirror.

Furthermore, the radical othering of the body or the desire to eat as monstrous can be explained in terms of post-colonial theory. Following Edward Said's account of "orientalism" (1978)—that is the West's need to make exotic and dangerous all that is Eastern—eating-disordered women divorce themselves from the qualities they dislike by turning them into exaggerated monstrous entities. As individuals from one culture or race shore up their identities in contradistinction to what they regard as opposite from themselves, the bulimic or anorectic or compulsive dieter assigns radical foreignness to her body and her desire to eat. The fear of eating, then, is considered so hideous by eating-disordered narrators that they try to literally sever it from themselves by projecting it onto a monster.

Whatever the specific explanation, many women in America are so anxious about food, and feel so under pressure to be thin that they need to cut themselves off from their desire for food. In text after text appetite and the body are identified with beasts, demons, or monsters; malevolent agency is projected onto food stuffs and the hungry body. Food appears to devour the speaker or force her to eat in a form of reversed cannibalism. The body appears demonic, an aggressive

pursuer. By contrast the eating-disordered speaker portrays herself as a helpless innocent who has no power to determine her own actions.

I read eating disorders as pathologies of American culture. Eating-disordered narrators express intensified versions of worries many middle-class American women have about their bodies and food. Many have a lack of ease with eating that leads them to perceive their appetite and their bodies as monstrous. Wanting food is depicted as evil and overwhelming; the body that eats resembles a rabid beast or demon. Portrayals of the body as monstrous and divided reveal the fractured way many American women experience embodiment. They divorce hunger for food from their idealized selves and perceive themselves as evil when they do eat. In these texts we find images of a culture that through endless reinforcement makes many women sick.

Notes

¹ See, for instance, Jenefer Shute's *Life-Size*, 33-34.

² A powerfully written popular treatment of this theme is Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth* (1981). More academic discussions of the connection between female emancipation in the work world and female subjugation due to the dictates of personal appearance are provided by Susan Bordo, Sandra Lee Bartky and Sharlene Hesse-Biber.

³ See, for instance, Jeffery Sobal for evidence of the gender bias in American sizism, that is social prejudice based on weight and size. In "Social Influences on Body Weight" Sobal documents the inverse relationship between wealth and weight among American women—more well-off women tend to weigh less than their economically disadvantaged counterparts—and argues that heavier women have more difficulty finding desirable romantic partners than thin ones. The covariation between thinness, wealth, and romantic success for women increases the belief that heavier women who achieve in their careers need to compensate for their lack of success in shaping their bodies.

⁴ See Sarah Hildebrandt's essay on hair removal in this volume.

⁵ Founders of cultural criticism and cultural materialism include, among others, Raymond Williams, who argues that cultural hegemony involves a fluctuation between dominant and emergent elements, and Clifford Geertz with his insight into the constructed quality of all notions of humanity. See *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* (1996) for an excellent introduction into this textual practice.

⁶ For the history of eating disorders see Brumberg and Habermas.

⁷ See Mervat Nassar on the globalization of eating disorders.

⁸ See Peter Stearns's *Fat History* for a cross-cultural comparison of the meaning of dieting in France and the United States.

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“Framing Isabel”: About Some *fin-de-siècle* Portraits of Ladies

Monika Seidl

When we engage in reading a novel we expect a narrative sequence; when we engage in looking at a portrait we expect a mimetic reflection. A novel entitled *The Portrait of a Lady*¹ promises both, and addresses through its title the problem of representation in its conflicting forms. In what follows I will read, from a 21st-century perspective, Henry James's (1843-1916) novel side by side with bourgeois representational portraits of women done by the Austrian Gustav Klimt (1862-1918).

James's novel and Klimt's portraits are both products of a male view of *fin-de-siècle* women in an emergent modern world. Around the turn of the century, portrait painting of females was thriving, despite the advent of photography, and these portraits provided one version of space within which women were imagined by men.² In the majority of these bourgeois representational portraits those depicted are imagined as detached and untouchable women, as highly eroticised objects of male desire. At that time female identities were in flux; and the traditional idea of woman was about to fall apart.

Some of my thinking below is inspired by Gilles Deleuze, who in his book about Francis Bacon³ developed a “logic of sensation” contrary to a “logic of representation”. What is interesting about this book in the context of embodiments of culture are the two notions of “figuration” and “figure” and the movement from the one to the other, which Deleuze defines as a movement of the mimetically represented body towards the non-representational figure and as a movement of body as depth towards body as purely material surface. I will argue that in both novel and pictures we may discover elements of this logic of sensation as a strategy to force the female body into a static position. In these depictions women have been stabilised, solidified within the frame of the portrait, as a seemingly last resort, a desperate strategy, to centre and to frame woman in the modern world.

In this study, I would like to first show how *fin-de-siècle* women can be represented as bodiless surfaces and thus as objects, a process of de-humanisation which heightens their exchange value and at the same

time exposes them to a male fetishist look captivated by sensation and the spectacular; secondly, argue that the depictions in question exclude a female view, as woman is firmly positioned as object and thus devoid of a spectatorial position of her own; thirdly, look at instances where these constructed binary oppositions, male vs. female, eye/I vs. it, are replaced with dialectically constructed and, hence, shifting positions of identity and looking; and finally, explore this dialectic by looking at both novel and pictures arguing that visible *fin-de-siècle* women inhabit shifting positions which can only temporarily be forced into fixation, as can be observed in the portraits in question.

Beginning with conceptions of visibility as they appear in *The Portrait of a Lady* in general, and in reference to Isabel Archer, the novel's protagonist, specifically, I would like to take a closer look at Isabel framed in doorways as she appears in key scenes of the novel, and then focus on female visibility as spectacle, which does not allow for woman as director of the gaze. Women who are visible are powerless as objects, but at the same time are powerful as dominant posers. This will lead to notions of surface value as a mode of representing identity in both novel and paintings, and the various patterns of objectification resulting from this strategy. In concluding, I will discuss instances of female disobedience towards the stabilising processes described, once again with reference to both novel and paintings.

Drawing parallels between a painter and a novelist seems very apt in the case of Henry James, for whom the faculty of vision had a paramount share in producing knowledge, and who referred to *The Portrait of a Lady* in its 1908 preface as a "canvas" for which he was seeking "the true touch" (41). This "true touch" he was trying to apply to a novel which tells the story of the young American Isabel Archer, whose European cousin and uncle furnish her with a fortune, and who, after declining the hand of two eligible suitors, is framed into a dysfunctional marriage with an artistic, and cruel, man of no means.

The Portrait of a Lady is full of fictional scenes of beholding, where "an impression" or "an image" produces knowledge. On one occasion, Madame Merle, the novel's framing matchmaker, knows from one look from a distance that Isabel Archer has fallen in love with her confidant Gilbert Osmond, who will become Isabel's mismatched husband. She deduces this knowledge from a certain constellation of bodies and a parasol (see 319). Another classic example for the close link between

vision and knowledge typical of the novel is the famous revelatory scene, when it dawns on Isabel that Madame Merle and Gilbert Osmond share an intimacy she has never been aware of. This scene starts as follows: "Just beyond the threshold of the drawing room she stopped short, the reason for her doing so being that she had received an impression" (457), and rounding up the scene we learn, "but the thing made an image, lasting only a moment, like a sudden flicker of light" (458). You literally see the photographer's bulb flash, which burns on glass; the picture says it all. Knowledge is acquired through vision.

These tableaux vivants interrupt the narrative flow through static images at key moments in the novel. They work as revelatory freeze-frames and let readers and characters alike gain knowledge in the manner of a two-dimensional, synoptic overview. In *The Portrait of a Lady* images of doorways are frequent, and at key moments in the novel Isabel is seen standing in doorways in another framing strategy.

There are paradoxical aspects about these images of thresholds and framed pictures as they indicate both spaces of constraint as well as in-between spaces, in the sense of third spaces which allow for changes and moments of freedom: a door may be seen as a space that, similar to stairs, leads somewhere, and a frame around a window not only limits a view but also makes it possible in the first place. So Isabel seen within the frame of a door may not only be read as a static image of constraint but may also point towards her transitory status, as the first and final images of her in the doorways of Gardencourt indicate.

So the doors that appear at key moments of the novel represent moments of restraint and moments of change simultaneously. For a momentary freeze in time the person standing in the doorway is represented as a picture; adding the element of time we may perceive the door as an opportunity, as an indicator of change.⁴

Isabel is introduced to the novel as "object of observation", as a spectacle, when she makes "her appearance in the ample doorway" (69) of Gardencourt, the English country house her expatriate relatives have chosen as their home. This is the first frame she is put into and in this frame, which is "ample", she still has room to move. She is called an "independent" woman and she directs her gaze confidently: "She was looking at everything, with an eye that denoted clear perception – at her companion, at the dogs, at the two gentlemen under the trees, at the beautiful scene that surrounded her" (70). She is taking possession of everything visually; she is the focaliser and her surroundings the

focalised. In these first moments at Gardencourt "she lingered so near the threshold", from where she presents herself as a picture. This lingering state indicates her in-between status: she does not yet occupy any space properly, as she will do later in her appearance as "the picture of a gracious lady" (418), when she is iconified in her marriage with Osmond.

Isabel will be framed once again within a doorway when she disappears into the safety of Gardencourt towards the end of the novel, a scene which in my reading marks Isabel's attaining spiritual freedom. "But when darkness returned she was free" (636). As Clair Hughes⁵ has pointed out, Isabel is the lady in black who contrary to conventions of her day chooses the colour of darkness as her attire. The "child of light", as Isabel is called, is also simultaneously a child of darkness⁶ who defies representation. Surrounded by darkness she vanishes into the house. The spectators are left outside in the dark, and from now on she is no longer visible. "She looked all about her; she listened a little . . ." (636), as it says in the novel. There is no longer anyone who may direct his gaze at her, and there is not even anyone she can hear. "She listens" is an important detail in this context, as sound, according to Sartre⁷, precedes the gaze: hearing someone, especially at one's back, precedes the experience of being looked at.⁸ Isabel no longer sees nor hears anyone, she has successfully escaped representation, she is free. The connections between identity and representation and between identity and sensation are both cut. Her story will no longer be told, she will no longer be seen, will no longer appear as a painting or as a precious object, she finally disappears through the frame she has stood in so often.

This reading of the novel's ending deviates from other readings; I would like to quote from an example which concentrates on bodily matters, namely on Isabel's physicality, and the changes Henry James made in his revised 1908 New York edition of the novel: in her essay "Substantive Sexuality: Henry James Constructs Isabel Archer as a Complete Woman in His Revised Version of *The Portrait of a Lady*", Bonnie L. Herron claims that "the narrator presents a less emotional and more objectified description of Isabel" and "a sexually more aware Isabel".⁹ This reading is based on a dichotomy between light and darkness, whereby light stands for Isabel's sexuality. In this reading darkness symbolises her return to a world where she refuses to let the "light" of her sexuality shine. As mentioned above, I read darkness more within a framework of strategies of representation, which leads me

to Isabel exposed to "light" and being very visible as "picture of a gracious lady" "framed in a gilded doorway" (418), as she is seen by Mr Rosier at a pivotal point in the middle of the novel. Mr Rosier forces Isabel into a frame, stabilises her and exposes her to an erotically highly charged fetishist look. The "gracious lady" poses in Mr Rosier's view in a "gilded doorway", hence establishing to a connection between "gracious" and "gilded". Via displacement these ornaments become something that belongs to Isabel, an inorganic fetish underscoring her status as an object with high exchange value.

As she stands on thresholds and poses like a picture, Isabel, with her body as the primary signifier, represents the "idea of an interesting woman" (74), especially to the maker of this idea, Lord Warburton, who is one of her suitors and one of her many male beholders. In the same way that Isabel's body represents an idea, the *fin-de-siècle* portraits are also not literal reproductions of those depicted but strive towards elevation, conveying an idea of woman conceived by man.

This aspect is clearly linked to one of the key issues of *The Portrait of a Lady*, namely the problem whether it is surfaces that represent one's self or whether the self is an immaterial entity. I will concentrate on the problem of surfaces and their value, which will lead to examples of objectification as found in the novel and the portraits. One of the key issues in the novel is the question whether objects create a person. This notion is best articulated in the often-quoted passage in which Madame Merle tells Isabel that

every human being has his shell and . . . you must take the shell into account. By the shell I mean the whole envelope of circumstances. There's no such thing as an isolated man or woman; we're each of us made up of some cluster of appurtenances. What shall we call our "self"? Where does it begin? Where does it end? It overflows into everything that belongs to us – and then it flows back again." (253)

Like spectators in general, Madame Merle has "a great respect for things" (253) which are the items via which selves define themselves.¹⁰

When Isabel is represented as a "picture of a gracious lady" the "cluster of appurtenances" has closed in on her. The process that leads to this fixation of Isabel is closely linked to the creation of one's self via objectification strategies, which are pursued by all parties involved. On numerous occasions men regard Isabel as an object, be it as a painting or as the most precious objet d'art that Osmond manages to add to his

collection. Isabel herself, however, also colludes in these strategies as she actively collaborates in the process of self-objectification.

At the beginning of the novel Isabel goes with Ralph to have a look at Gardencourt's picture gallery. During this walk Ralph turns her into a picture, as he prefers glancing at her to glancing at the pictures: "He lost nothing, in truth, by these wandering glances, for she was better worth looking at than most works of art" (99). What follows is a detailed description of her outward appearance, her body fragmented as Ralph's eyes rest on it. At the same time he adds this body Isabel to his collection. On another occasion, in the Roman palazzo, Lord Warburton "saw nothing but the clear profile of this young lady defined against the dim illumination of the house" (350). This description very much resembles the depictions of women in *fin-de-siècle* portraits against a very flat background which gives them no room to move.¹¹ Again in the picture gallery of Gardencourt during the conversation with Lord Warburton (in response to his proposal which she declines), Isabel presents herself to him as the picture she is soon to become. She does this actively, which foreshadows her future mastery of self-objectification: "Isabel walked to the other side of the gallery and stood there showing him her charming back, her light slim figure, the length of her white neck as she bent her head, and the density of her dark braids" (185).

Seeing Isabel as a picture is a first step towards objectification, seeing Isabel as a precious objet d'art is a second step, increasing her value. The perfect environment for this increase in exchange value is a "cluster of appurtenances", such as can be found surrounding Gilbert Osmond, the novel's most expert collector of precious things. Osmond's rooms tell of "arrangements subtly studied and refinements frankly proclaimed" (279). These arrangements comprise all "those" (as they are deictically referred to in a derogatory tone) "articles of which Italy has long been the not quite exhausted store-house." These objects are appropriated to form tasteful surroundings amidst "modern furniture in which large allowance has been made for the lounging generation" (279). The furniture provided puts people who come and visit in a position to display themselves in the "deep and well padded chairs" (279). The choice of furniture wills bodies into poses, so that they may nicely blend in with all the objects on display.

Osmond himself is the high priest of all these beauties, having fashioned himself according to an old painting. "He had a fine, narrow

extremely modelled and composed face" (280) and "he was a gentleman who studied style" and who "cut his beard in the manner of portraits of the sixteenth century" (280). When Isabel first meets him he appears to her as a perfect objectification, "as fine as one of the drawings in the long gallery above the bridge of the Uffizi." (298) As a high priest of style, an "abdicated" "prince in disguise" (299), he no longer belongs anywhere specific but has defined himself via his belongings.

Isabel feels an irresistible attraction to objects with a past and thus with an added value. Mrs Touchett's house in Florence is for Isabel "a shell of the sea of the past. This vague eternal rumour kept her imagination awake" (297). Similar things will happen in Osmond's museum of things from the past, which all seem to capture Isabel's imagination. Isabel does not care for the cotton mill of Caspar Goodwood, her American suitor, but she cares for things with a past. Therefore she cares for Osmond's "faded hangings of damask and tapestry" (279), those items in the "art-culture system"¹², which used to be commodities and which have moved up to the status of artefacts. For Isabel everything in Osmond's villa is "beautiful and precious" (306) and everything in the house is objectified upon first encounter: Osmond's sister Amy is seen as a bird of fashion, his daughter Pansy as a painting.

In these surroundings issues of value are of utmost importance and therefore Isabel as a woman of independent means holds an attraction for Osmond. When he learns, however, that Isabel has declined a lord she becomes even more eligible: "he perceived a new attraction in the idea of taking to himself a young lady who had qualified herself to figure in his collection of choice objects by declining so noble a hand" (354). Osmond's decision is preceded by the scene in the Capitol, where Lord Warburton stands in front of the Dying Gladiator and where Isabel contemplates the "noble quietude", "motionless grace" and "beautiful blank faces" (353) of antique marbles, all qualities which will soon be her own qualities when she will pose, objectified, "motionless", in the doorframe of the Roman palazzo.

When Ralph meets Isabel in Rome this "beautiful blank face" appears to him as a mask which "completely covered her face. There was something fixed and mechanical in the serenity"¹³ painted on it; this was not an expression, Ralph said – it was a representation, it was even an advertisement" (443). This passage describing Isabel during her dysfunctional marriage gets close to describing her as a portrait

representing an idea: "what he saw was the fine lady who was supposed to represent something" (444). In Ralph's view it is Osmond that she represents and "the gullible world was in a manner embodied in poor Isabel" (445), and we may add that the "cluster of appurtenances" has closed in on her.

Isabel's share in the process of objectification is foreseen by Henrietta: "you must often displease others. . . . That doesn't suit you at all – you're too fond of admiration, you like to be thought of well. (268). Isabel is keen on producing a "pleasing impression" (88), she wants to represent herself as something special, which becomes obvious when we learn about her: "Isabel had in the depth of her nature an . . . unquenchable desire to please" (88). Pleasing others but particularly pleasing herself will eventually decide her fate. "Live as you like best, and your character will take care of itself" (274), this is Ralph's advice to Isabel after she has inherited Mr Touchett's money, and her character does take care of itself: it follows the pleasure principle. Furnished with the money, Isabel "lost herself in a maze of vision" (275), which she mistakes for knowledge, and she falls prey to Osmond's zeal as a collector and thereby objectifies herself.

Turning to aspects of female visibility in the context of seeing and being seen and to similarities between some Klimt portraits and James's *Portrait*, it will be shown that novel and portraits construct active looking as an activity not appropriate for women.

Isabel as a "sight", as a picture, as a visible woman and one version of the Jamesian New Woman is someone who is constructed as a public sight and a public subject. She does not represent, however, the New Woman who moves freely in public, which is the role assigned to her friend Henrietta Stackpole. Isabel is visible as a sight and objectified as a portrait on display, as a shining fetishised surface, and can therefore easily be turned into an object of male visualisation. Isabel does not conceive herself as a publicly visible woman first and foremost. Objectifying herself as a portrait on display is a second-order strategy in order to turn into a visible woman. In a similar way the women in the Klimt portraits are visible on display, decorating the walls of their semi-public living rooms. The women in the *fin-de-siècle* portraits employed a similar second-order strategy to become visible at all. Like Isabel they only achieve visibility via their objectification in pictures, banned within the frame of an ornamental two-dimensionality.

In her days in Albany, Isabel is regarded as an "original", and it is Mr Ludlow, her brother-in-law, who says that what he likes is women who are "translations", because these are the ones he can fathom. Although Osmond will do all he can to turn Isabel into a translation, she shines as an original, which makes her all the more eligible because of the aura of authenticity she has about her. Isabel, like the ladies in the Klimt portraits, has turned into a work of art which can be valued within the surroundings of an art collection as a singular masterpiece. As a masterpiece she can please herself as well as others as the most valuable item available in terms of artistic achievement.

Another instance of similarity between novel and pictures has to do with eyes and seeing. Henrietta Stackpole, the New Woman who is visible in public and does not embody the "idea of an interesting woman", possibly because she has no desire to please, which is a prominent feature in Isabel, and possibly also because she is a powerful director of the gaze. Henrietta's eyes, which are depicted as her most prominent feature, are compared to inanimate objects, when these eyes remind Ralph of "large polished buttons" (138). Looking the way Henrietta does is a male domain, she seems to have no right to the "fixedness" of her eyes, and thus Ralph feels "embarrassed" (138) by this look. Henrietta has shifted position, she is presented as someone who has occupied for herself a spectatorial position reserved for males and is therefore a threat. She has invaded male territory but by dehumanising her eyes as beautiful objects, as "large, polished buttons", she is made less dangerous. In the course of the novel seeing is construed as a faculty which is dangerous for women.

We find a parallel to this phenomenon in two of the Klimt portraits, *Fritza Riedler* (1906) and *Portrait of Adele Bloch-Bauer I* (1907)¹⁴, when we consider these women's highly stylised garments. Many ornamental eyes look at us, outdoing the human eyes in number and intensity. In the portrait of Fritza Riedler her human eyes seem to be strangely dead, looking into a void and not meeting the eyes of the spectators. When we see human eyes and ornamental eyes side by side, the borders between animate and inanimate objects are blurred. Thus the women depicted acquire an added value of precious objects, the eyes are fetishised, which leads us back to surface value vs. depth and sensation vs. representation and the flattening of the body through the "cluster of appurtenances".

In Osmond's household Isabel is fashioned as an *objet d'art*, as a surface upon which ornaments are heaped:

Osmond hated to see his thought reproduced literally – that made it look stale and stupid . . . this lady's intelligence was to be a silver¹⁵ plate . . . a plate [and, let me add, a surface] that he could heap up with ripe fruits, to which it would give a decorative value, so that talk might become to him a sort of served dessert. He found the silver quality in this perfection in Isabel; he could tap her imagination with his knuckle and make it ring. (401)

A similar strategy to be found in the paintings is the blending of the bodies of those depicted into flat ornamental structures. It is a typical feature of the Klimt portraits that the women's hands and faces stick out as mimetic representations, closely resembling the bodily features of the sitters. Thus in analogy to Deleuze's model, hands and faces are painted according to the "logic of representation", as "figuration". The rest of the bodies, however, is sheer surface, spectacular sensation, non-representational "figure". The movement of body as depth towards body as surface is a process which, according to Deleuze, involves violence. It is a similar violence which presses the women into the frames of their various portraits, thereby flattening out their bodies as glossy, shiny surfaces, as objects and potential fetishes satisfying male desire.

There is a striking resemblance between Isabel's self-fashioning and how she is fashioned as an *objet d'art*, and the way *fin-de-siècle* ladies were fashioned and were fashioning themselves as portraits. The ladies in the portraits followed a logic of sensation which is similar to Isabel Archer's self-objectifying strategies, when they clad themselves in ornamental draperies that partly resembled the wall-paper that was depicted behind them.¹⁶ The bodies of the women represented disappear behind these ornamental draperies. Two-dimensional surfaces are substituted for bodies¹⁷, which means, in the words of Madame Merle, too much of the "cluster of appurtenances" has "flown back".

Like Isabel in her various frames Klimt's women also let themselves be squeezed into the frames of their portraits where there is not much space left for those depicted. Various strategies of restraint are applied: there is first the frame of the picture itself, which may cut away parts of the body of the depicted. Secondly, ornaments, furniture or rectangles can often be seen within the picture, all elements which mirror frames and which take away women's space or even visually decapitate them,

as in the portrait of Margaret Stonborough-Wittgenstein, where a white rectangle cuts through her neck.¹⁸

Isabel Archer pays for her desire to please herself and to please others. She has underestimated Osmond's power as a proprietor. Her only way out is to defy representation and "dart" (636) like an animal through darkness. Likewise some of the ladies of *fin-de-siècle* Vienna were not happy with the way they found themselves represented in Gustav Klimt's paintings. Two of them, however, did not resort to darkness and came up with other solutions, which denote new, shifting positions of identity and looking.

One woman who was not keen on her representation by Klimt was Margaret Stonborough-Wittgenstein, who allegedly altered the painting to her liking; being an accomplished painter herself she re-painted her mouth.¹⁹ Still, the painting was not put on public display, but was stashed away in the first floor study of the house that her brother, the famous philosopher, built for her together with the architect Paul Engelmann. Another woman who did not like her portrait was the successful co-owner of a fashion house, Emilie Flöge, Klimt's muse. She is depicted posing like a fashion model²⁰ in a greenish blue ornamental fantasy dress, which flows along her body like water sparkling in the sun. Emilie Flöge did not even think of "darting" through darkness, but rather chose "light" and another artist for self-representation, namely Dora Kallmus, the proprietor of the photographic studio Madame D'Ora²¹. Photography also objectifies and fashions those depicted, but as a medium it also represents the viscosity of the arbitrary and the viscosity of everyday life, which is a viscosity very much removed from the highly erotic, fetishised and bodiless women of Klimt's paintings.

To conclude I would like to hypothesise that Isabel Archer, the "child of light", might have also preferred to have been portrayed by a lady.

Notes

¹ *The Portrait of a Lady* was first published in serial form in *Macmillan's Magazine* (October 1880-November 1881) and *The Atlantic Monthly* (November 1880-December 1881). The present paper is based on the revised New York Edition of 1908 as reprinted in the Penguin Classics series of 1984. Page numbers refer to this edition.

² For *fin-de-siècle* spaces imagined for women by women see the prolific school of Finnish women painters.

³ Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon. Logik der Sensation*, trans. Joseph Vogel (München: Fink, 1995).

⁴ Images of frames are a recurring feature of the novel. When the rear view of Gardencourt is introduced we are shown the "extension of a luxurious interior" where the turf is a "wide carpet" (60) and which "was furnished like a room" (61). This "room" is set off by trees whose shade is compared to "velvet curtains". We look onto a stage, or into a picture. So when Isabel stands in the frame of the doorway she is another picture within a picture.

⁵ Clair Hughes, "The Color of Life: The Significance of Dress in *The Portrait of a Lady*", *The Henry James Review* 18.1 (1997): 66-80.

⁶ Isabel's idea of experience and happiness is closely connected to darkness: "A swift carriage, of a dark night, rattling with four horses over roads that one can't see – that's my idea of happiness" (219).

⁷ See Margaret Olin, "Gaze", *Critical Terms for Art History*, ed. Robert S. Nelson and Richard Shiff (Chicago: U of Chicago P) 208-219.

⁸ There is another instance of sound preceding the look in the Capitol encounter with Lord Warburton (see 337).

⁹ Bonnie L. Herron, "Substantive Sexuality: Henry James Constructs Isabel Archer as a Complete Woman in His Revised Version of *The Portrait of a Lady*", *The Henry James Review* 16.2 (1995): 131-141.

¹⁰ In *The Principles of Psychology* (1890. London: Macmillan, 1910, 2 vols.), William James made a similar claim: "a man's Self is the sum total of all that he CAN call his, not only his body and his psychic powers, but his clothes and his house, his wife and children, his ancestors and friend, his reputation and works, his lands and yacht and bank account" (vol. 1, 291).

¹¹ Hans Makart, *Portrait of Adele Gräfin Waldstein-Wartenberg* (1875), Brno, Moravská galerie; Hans Makart, *Dame mit Federhut in Rückenansicht* (1874/75), Nürnberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum; Hans Makart, *Portrait of Charlotte Wolter as "Messalina"* (1875), Vienna, Historisches Museum der Stadt Wien.

¹² James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1988), 224.

¹³ We should not forget that Madame Merle's Christian name is Serena, which hints at her being the perfect mask.

¹⁴ Both paintings are in the Österreichische Galerie Belvedere, Vienna.

¹⁵ Similar to the "gilded doorway" and the golden surfaces in the Klimt paintings, this is another example of the construction of precious metal as something that belongs to woman, as an inorganic fetish with high exchange value.

¹⁶ Gustav Klimt, *Portrait of Friederike Maria Beer* (1916), Tel Aviv, Museum of Art.

¹⁷ Juliane Vogel, in an interview for the Swiss radio series "Reflexe", 25 Sept. 2000.

¹⁸ Gustav Klimt, *Portrait of Margaret Stonborough-Wittgenstein* (1905), Munich, Neue Pinakothek.

¹⁹ Paul Wijdeveld, *Ludwig Wittgenstein, Architekt* (Amsterdam: Wiese Verlag, 1994) 64.

²⁰ Gustav Klimt, *Portrait of Emilie Flöge* (1902), Vienna, Historisches Museum.

²¹ Dora Kallmus, *Portrait of Emilie Flöge* (1909).

“body for body”: The Repulsive and Eroticized Bodies of Djuna Barnes

Astrid M. Fellner

“Djuna Barnes, so charming, so Irish, and so gifted, came to Paris in the twenties. . . . Certainly she was one of the most talented and, I think, one of the most fascinating literary figures in the Paris of the twenties” (Beach 112). This is how Sylvia Beach, founder of the bookstore “Shakespeare and Company” (and the first publisher of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*), remembers Djuna Barnes. She was part of Robert McAlmon’s “crowd,” as Beach referred to this group of expatriates, known to all those who had been members of the Greenwich Village group in New York. Dressed in a long, black opera cape originally owned by Peggy Guggenheim, Barnes was a striking figure who was soon considered the most important woman writer of the Paris community.

Barnes’s status as a legendary figure of the American expatriate culture in Paris was probably enhanced by her reclusive life-style, and the anecdotes and portraits that surrounded Barnes through her ninety years have created a picture of a controversial and complex figure. Barnes “is mentioned in nearly every memoir of the period, her beauty and caustic wit the best remembered of her characteristics” (Benstock, *Women* 230). Apart from her many female friends—among them Mina Loy, Natalie Barney, Janet Flanner, Peggy Guggenheim, and Thelma Wood (with whom she had a long, destructive affair)—she also had important male friends. T.S. Eliot was a loyal supporter of her work and James Joyce discussed his work with her. Her contemporaries praised her style and eloquence but feared her sharp tongue. McAlmon considered her a “very haughty lady quick on the uptake, with a wise-cracking tongue” (Knoll 167) and Ezra Pound, who helped Barnes in her first years in Paris but later distanced himself from her, described her as a woman who “weren’t too cuddly” (Field 107).¹

Largely because Barnes only published sporadically in later life and began to withdraw almost completely into a bitter seclusion after her return to New York, her literary reputation has cast her into the role of an obscure and melancholic writer. Mostly remembered for her novel *Nightwood* (1936), which has a laudatory introduction by Eliot and was

likened to the work of Joyce, Barnes was often excluded from the modernist canon and has until recently received only little critical attention.² Barnes experimented with a variety of genres—including poetry, short stories, plays, short essays and journalism, and theater reviews—and was both a portrait painter and an illustrator of her own work. Her novel *Ryder* (1928) and her play *The Antiphon* (1958) center on family life. In her poetry, *The Book of Repulsive Women* (1915), short stories (*A Book*, 1923; *A Night Among the Horses*, 1929), and in *Ladies Almanack* (1928) Barnes explores the nature of female sexuality, examining the difference within sexual difference and within gender. All her works can be read as a critique of woman's place in Western society, focusing on the relation between women's physical and psychological states. As some critics have suggested, Barnes's texts address the question of woman's relationship to her body, revealing a profound uncertainty and ambiguity towards the female body. Shari Benstock, for instance, has noted that Barnes's works provide

contrasting views of women's body: the first its repulsive form, seen through the eyes of women who see themselves as a man would see them; the second the eroticized form woman sees when she has recaptured her sexuality from the patriarchal culture that appropriated it (*Women of the Left Bank*, 252-253).

In the following, I will examine Barnes's *The Book of Repulsive Women* and *Ladies Almanack*, showing how the conflicting discourses of the female body are enacted in Barnes's texts in order to explore sexual difference. I will not only analyze the frequently contradictory views of the female body in Barnes's literary texts, but also look at her texts in connection with the sexually explicit drawings that accompany these two books. Furthermore, I will also focus on the persona of Djuna Barnes, "the lady of fashion," who penned the *Ladies Almanack* and assumed the reputation of a bohemian cult figure. Photographs from this time capture her elegance and style, and of the Left Bank community she was considered the most beautiful. By taking extreme care with her appearance—she was always dressed stylishly and extravagantly despite her financial problems—Barnes sought to escape the claims her body made on her, attempting to gain control of it and freeing it from patriarchal constraints. Barnes's sartorial performances, visible both in the way she dressed and in the way in which she dressed her poems and books, are part of the cultural practice of masquerade through which

Barnes exaggerates the cultural staging of the female sex, revealing the constructed nature of sexual difference.

Masquerading the Body

The body for Barnes is not the locus of stable gender identity, but rather the battlefield upon which various conflicting constructions of gender and sexual identities are enacted. As recent feminist critics have pointed out, gender is itself "a corporeal style, a way of acting the body, a way of wearing one's own flesh as a cultural sign" (Butler 256). Drawing on Joan Riviere's notion of masquerade in her essay "Womanliness as a Masquerade" and Lacan's revision of that essay, theorists have sought to define "woman" as a construct that depends, for reasons social and political as well as erotic, upon masks and masquerade. Riviere argued that it was impossible to separate masquerade from womanliness. Femininity thus is already masquerade, that is, mimicry. Far from being written into nature, Butler further argues that sex and gender should be viewed as the discursive products of cultural production. As she suggests:

Consider that a sedimentation of gender norms produces the peculiar phenomenon of a "natural sex" or a "real woman" or any number of prevalent and compelling social functions, and that this is a sedimentation that over time has produced a set of corporeal styles which, in reified form, appear as the natural configuration of bodies into sexes existing in a binary relation to one another. If these styles are enacted, and if they produce the coherent gendered subjects who pose as their originators, what kind of performance might reveal this ostensible "cause" to be an "effect"? (Butler 140).

Masquerade and cross-dressing cut gender off from its presumed origins in biological difference and thus turn it into performance. As Butler says: "If gender attributes . . . are not expressive but performative, then these attributes effectively constitute the identity they are said to express or reveal" (141). The attributes that are ascribed to men and women thus constitute our conception of man and woman. Herein lies the attraction of camouflage and cross-dressing for women, who use these techniques in order to gain self-authorization. At the beginning of the twentieth century this strategy of self-fashioning was especially attractive for women. Female modernists, as Gubar argues, "escaped the strictures of

societally-defined femininity by appropriating the costumes they identified with freedom. By the turn of the century, moreover, many identified male clothing with such a costume of freedom" (478).

While many of Barnes's contemporaries on the Left Bank, like Gertrude Stein, Sylvia Beach or Janet Flanner, cross-dressed in order to gain authority and freedom, Barnes staged herself as rather feminine—although she, of course, uses characters who crossdress in her works, like Dr. Matthews O'Connor in *Nightwood*. She took great care with her appearance and was dressed extravagantly and wore dark red lipstick and blood red nail polish (cf. Benstock, *Women* 253). Barnes's glamorous beauty was depicted by numerous photographers of the period, including Man Ray and his disciple Berenice Abbott. Barnes's ambivalence about her body is, however, "obvious in photographs of her, which are nearly always taken in profile, emphasizing the ways in which she was divided against herself" (Benstock, *Women* 254). Immensely vain, Barnes affected a pose that drew attention to her beauty, and it was her beauty, as Benstock says, that made her vulnerable. Natalie Barney, for instance, wrote the following portrait sketch of Barnes:

Djuna Barnes, upright, unsullied, unpolished, grew pale at the insolence of honor being accorded her. [...] I had never introduced an author more awkward and less capable of serving her own cause. [...] Djuna Barnes possesses a candor and a sense of humor which passes through Cervantes and goes right back to Rabelais. She is a curious combination of characteristics for a woman only in her thirties. Her appearance is most singular: She has a nose as sharply angled as an Eversharp pencil; her mouth has an irresistible laugh, and she squeezes her auburn hair tightly under her hat in the manner of Manet, resembling one of his most attractive sketches. One can see in the bone structure of her large hands that she rides horses, and no one has portrayed them as well as she and Degas. She is tall and slender, and her clothes fall at sharp angles against her powerful legs... (123)

Peggy Bacon described her in a similar way:

Djuna Barnes: An elegant head lifted on a slender neck and long aristocratic body. Peach-blond hair with ripples in it. Sharply tilted, scornful nose. Light eyes in shadowy hollows with a firm, bare gaze like a Siamese cat. Mouth forms an immobile ellipse. A trifle Hapsburg: Gives the effect of a solitary wading-bird, indifferent,

poised and insulated, arrested in a long pause. (*Off with Their Heads*, qtd. in Broe 5)

Robert McAlmon considered her “far too good-looking and witty not to command fondness and admiration for [him], even when she is rather overdoing the grande dame manner and talking soul and ideals” (Knoll 167-168). Barnes, as her contemporaries agree, was reclusive, but she was a performer (cf. Broe 5) and McAlmon’s statement concerning her “overdoing her grande dame manner” captures Barnes’s theatricality of appearance.

Barnes’s strategies of self-fashioning and her creation of masks, as I argue, enabled her to enact in her writings the otherwise impossible, namely to give voice and visibility to what has been silenced and erased. Engaging the contradictory and complex multiplicity of the female subject, she uses the representation of the body as a site of struggle to represent female desire. Masquerade doubles representation and, as Mary Ann Doane suggests, “is constituted by a hyperbolization of the accoutrements of femininity” (185). As an excess of femininity, masquerade destabilizes the image of woman and holds it at a distance. Barnes’s ambivalent relationship to her body and her reluctance to position herself should, I think, not be read as a weakness that also manifests itself in her literary texts.³ Her creation of masks has rather served as an enabling device through which she was able to resist the cultural confinements of the female body. Through the practices of masquerade Barnes uses stereotypical definitions of femininity in order to question them, deconstructing the cultural assumption of femaleness and the female body.⁴ This emphasis on the deconstructive nature of Barnes sartorial performance, always undoing itself as part of its process of self-enactment, is, I think, what makes her performance theoretically as well as politically and erotically interesting.

Repulsive and Eroticized Bodies: Barnes’s *The Book of Repulsive Women*

Beginning as a young and enthusiastic newspaper reporter in 1913, Barnes soon gained entrance to the Greenwich Village community of artists and bohemians, many of whom later joined the Paris expatriate community in the 1920s. In 1915, in New York, she published *The Book of Repulsive Women: 8 Rhythms and 5 Drawings* in Guido Bruno’s

Chapbook Series. This collection of poems and explicit drawings on the subject of female sexuality—written ten years before Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*—addresses what is called the “bitter secret” (*Book 14*), namely lesbianism. Seen as technically derivative of the *fin de siècle* decadent and symbolist movement, the poems in this book make use of rhyming, regularly metered stanzas and emblematic style that most critics have interpreted as a disguise of the “perversity” of her depicted subjects. As Kannenstine argues, the “alternating attitudes of fascination toward and repulsion from the spectacle of human wreckage show up in conspicuous stylistic excesses” (19). Style was meant to help obscure “the lure of the perverse” from an unsuspecting reading public and thus managed to get the book past the censors (cf. Galvin 86). It may be true that style acts as a protective covering, a mask which works as camouflage, for what might otherwise be censored. But unlike other modernist poems, such as the poems of Marianne Moore, in which the emphasis of the materiality of language eclipses the bodily materiality, the sexual specificity, which already becomes apparent in the title of the book, can easily be detected in these poems.⁷ Style, as Benstock argues, rather becomes “code: available to those who ‘know,’ unavailable to those who do not” (245). The sixth stanza of the poem entitled “From Fifth Avenue Up,” for example, reads:

See you sagging down with bulging
 Hair to sip,
 The dappled damp from some vague
 Under lip.
 Your soft saliva, loosed
 With orgy, drip (*Book 14*)

If these lines are read as a fairly direct reference to lesbian sexuality, it soon becomes clear that the poems deal with the unrepresentable desire of the lesbian subject. Struggling with the internalization of oppressive attitudes and representational codes in the area of sexuality, the lesbian subject cannot inhabit a clear-cut place of opposition from which she can dismantle the representations of female desire and the female body. Instead, lesbian desire and the lesbian body themselves become the locus of negotiation and de(con)struction. The poems thus enact the undoing of oppositions of sex and gender by exploring the other, and inhabiting the spaces of the between where seeming opposites come together. This project is necessarily located in the future and, in fact,

Barnes's *Book of Repulsive Women* projects itself into the future, the "someday":

Someday beneath some hard
 Capricious star-
 Spreading its light a little
 Over far,
 We'll know you for the woman
 That you are. (*Book 13*)

The use of the future and the subjunctive tense in the following lines, as in "We'd see your body in the grass" (*Book 14*), point to the impossibility of ever being able to represent female desire.

The Book of Repulsive Women thus engages the contradictory and complex multiplicity of the lesbian subject. While the word "repulsive" catches the reader's eye in the title of this collection, it is only explicitly mentioned once in the poems, that is in the fourth poem "Seen from the 'L'." The word "repulsive" stands, however, in direct relation to the word "vivid," so that the judgmental value of this word is undermined:

Though her lips are vague as fancy
 In her youth—
 They bloom vivid and repulsive
 As the truth
 Even vases in the making
 Are uncouth. (*Book 24*)

The highly stylized black-and-white illustrations, which are reminiscent of the drawings of Aubrey Beardsley, further add to the depiction of "repulsive, diseased" lesbianism. The drawings show woman as fragmented, grotesque, and abstract. But the illustrations, which feature a "familiar repertoire of mesmerized or vampirish females in commerce with a variety of unclean spirits" (Burke 71), take the Beardsleyan technique to an extreme, deconstructing the binary of "respectable" and "disreputable" woman. Revealing an awareness of the difficulty of representing sexual difference from a woman's perspective, the illustrations distort and dismantle the female body in order to recuperate it. Carolyn Burke argues that the woman or the women represented in this book are described as repulsive because they correspond to "the old images of women" which Barnes "needed to kill off" so that "a different vision might become possible" (70). The term "repulsive," however,

could also refer to the dominant cultural attitudes toward women, and by parodying mimicry of the morality of a heterosexist society, and camouflaging the female body as repulsive, Barnes reminds the reader "of the multiple levels of repulsion/attraction at work within the outsider observer's role" (Galvin 92). Through the satirical use of rhyme and verse patterns whose repetitions mock the very subject matter that they are in the process of unfolding, Barnes's use of the decadent, melancholic vision becomes obvious. Barnes self-reflexively refers to her "crooked" rhyme in the line "Dropping crooked into rhyme." This satiric game is stressed when she then rhymes the words "vice" and "virtue":

Ravelling grandly into vice
Dropping crooked into rhyme.
Slipping through the stitch of virtue,
Into crime. (*Book 24*)

Barnes's chapbook reveals the speaker's response to the "short, sharp modern Babylonian cries" of the new women. In poems with titles like "From Third Avenue On" and "Seen from the 'L'," the anonymity of the urban wasteland provides her nameless female subjects with the freedom of movement which culminates in disillusionment and spiritual death. The book ends with two short suicide poems in which two dead bodies are on display. "Corpse A," as the speaker implies, had a potential: dead, she is "a small shattered/ Cocoon,/ . . ./ all the subtle symphonies of her/A twilight rune." The second corpse receives no kindness in its description: it is "shock-abbreviated/As a city cat," and is lying "out flat listlessly like some small mug/Of beer gone flat" (*Book 35-36*). The decadence and degenerations of women's bodies in *The Book of Repulsive Women*, it seems, is an effect of patriarchal culture. As Benstock puts it, the modern woman "is estranged from a society that sacrifices her body on a patriarchal altar" (*Women* 241). The recuperation of the female body and the attempt to make visible what has been invisible thus involves a textual destruction of the lesbian body.

Writing the Lesbian Body: Barnes's Ladies Almanack

Ladies Almanack is also concerned with women who love women. Published privately in Paris in 1928, in an edition of 1,050 copies, the book contains twenty-two pen and ink drawings. *Ladies Almanack* is a satire on Natalie Barney's group of women, the Académie des Femmes, which met every Friday to read women's writings. Barney figures as Evangeline Musset in the book. Barnes does not appear in the text, but masquerades as a "Lady of Fashion," mocking, as Lanser puts it, "the classic denotation of female chastity in a virtual conflation of 'lady' and 'lesbian'" (157).

Described by its author as a "slight satiric wiggling" (qtd. in Benstock, *Women* 249), the book has evoked conflicted readings. While Kannenstine considers it a "virtually plotless exercise in technique" (33), in which style "gradually turns upon itself in parody" (49), he also sees moments of "Sapphic manifesto" (56) in the text. Andrew Field calls it a "lusty little book" (125), whose "finest portions . . . are about melancholy" (127). Recently, feminist critics have viewed the book both as "wicked satire" (Jay 185) and a celebration of lesbianism (Lanser).⁶ Such divergent readings reflect the conflicting discourse of lesbianism in the texts. As Benstock puts it, "*Ladies Almanack* reveals Barnes's enormous ambivalence about the sexual and social privilege it satirizes" ("Sapphic Modernism" 186). The text plays a double role, vacillating between positions, as the text is addressed to the women who are themselves the butt of satire. It thus crosses the "double cross" of the hetero/homosexual boundary, relinquishing "the power of cultural control over the text, letting the text 'speak itself' as the writer retracts the psychic fissures" (Benstock, "Sapphic Modernism" 188).

Again this text is illustrated, but unlike the stylized silhouettes of *The Book of Repulsive Women*, *Ladies Almanack* is full of details delineated with the apparently naïve perspective and technique of the "ancient chapbooks and broadsheets and *images populaires*," which Barnes acknowledges as her sources in the foreword to the 1972 Harper edition. The cover is based on *L'imagerie populaire* by "making ladies out of the soldiers following their leader and by putting a skirt on the leader's coat" (Doughty 146). The rest of the book is illustrated with baroque and medieval grotesques, parodying iconography, sexual caricature, feminized zodiacs, and other archaic emblems.

Like the drawings the sexual language is also in disguise and the book is in a sense about "getting it." According to Field, "the language is a tossed salad of ingredients" (126), exhibiting many neologisms combined with Elizabethan diction, strangely peppered with punctuation. The text speaks cryptically and evasively. Apparently written for women—the text advertises itself as "the book all ladies should carry" (*LA* 5)—*Ladies Almanack* writes the lesbian body, with the lone voice of Patience Scalpel (who is modeled on Mina Loy) interjecting the heterosexual point of view. It tells the mock-heroic story of its patron saint Dame Musset within the twelve calendar months of the almanac. The calendar is a celebration of woman's accomplishments, it lists her "tides and moons," her "spring fevers, love philters and winter feasts," but it is also a depiction of her "distempers"—the signs of her "fallen" condition. Since the fall of Eve, the pain of the world has been rooted in sexual difference, and the "Earth sucked down her generations, Body for Body." The *Ladies Almanack* provides an alternative to this tale of heterosexual aggression, offering a lesbian creation myth in the birth of the first Woman born with a difference:

Evangeline Musset was not one of these, for she had been developed in the Womb of her most gentle Mother to be a Boy, when therefore, she came forth an Inch or so less than this . . . (*LA* 7)

From the original story of Dame Musset to the debates on lesbian marriage staged by "Lady Buck-and-Balk" (Lady Una Troubridge) and Lady Tilly-Tweed-in-Blood (Radclyffe Hall) to the Zodiac in which Barnes spins a lesbian creation myth, as becomes apparent in the section "This is the part of Heaven that has never been told" (*LA* 24), Barnes presents a wide variety of lesbian existence.

The signs of the zodiac are pictured in relation to a part of woman's body, each described erotically: "the longing leg," "the twining thigh," "the seeking arm," and "the hungry heart" (*LA* 52). Woman's womb becomes "the spinning centre of a spinning world" (*LA* 51). The book thus involves the textual construction of the lesbian body and lesbian desire as well as the destruction of conventional codes that govern the representation of female desire and the female body, as object of male heterosexual desire. The body, as a consequence, becomes fragmented. As Sielke sums up the dilemma of the modern woman artist: if female subjectivity is problematized, "a deconstructive aesthetics necessarily

reinscribes femininity as fragmentation" (Sielke 62). In the "October" section we find the various parts of the female body almost dancing on the page. But it is the multiplicity of the meaning that attaches to the parts and the whole of the female body that allows for diverse reconnections and connections to be made.

Ladies Almanack also attempts to discover the pleasure of woman's speech, and, as Lanser puts it, the text speaks in "tongues" (Lanser 164). In trying to define the feminine, Barnes's text clearly anticipates the French feminist notion of *écriture féminine*. In "The Laugh of the Medusa" Hélène Cixous argues that writing the body becomes a way of giving voice to repressed female sexuality and the female libido which it sustains:

By writing her self, woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display—the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions. Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time. (Cixous 250)

The reclamation of the tongue also entails a recuperation of the female voice. In the "December" section Evangeline Musset dies, and after various funeral services and rituals of mourning she is finally cremated. Her tongue, however, "would not suffer Ash," but "flickers to this day ... on the altar in the temple of love" (*LA* 84). In transforming death to sexual resurrection *Ladies Almanack* reclaims the positivity of the female body. The tongue is celebrated as a sexual instrument, counteracting "emerging Freudian notions of phallic supremacy and clitoral insufficiency" (Lanser 162). For all its symbolic affirmation, the tongue, as Frann Michel has pointed out, remains a troubling image, as it cannot speak (cf. 182). While *Ladies Almanack* speaks pleasure and delight, it does so equivocally, displaying the "otherness of the cultural norm that recognizes its Other only in fear or mockery" (Benstock, "Sapphic Modernism 189).

Ladies Almanack can be read as affirmative, "but its affirmation depends upon an unstable irony that also invokes the masculine: the text is always potentially compromised by that which it subverts" (Michel 182). The transformational power of Barnes's writings, with its feminist content, is thus a function of reading, of encoding and decoding the masked ambiguity. Barnes's sartorial performance involves a

questioning of the "naturalness" of gender roles through various bodily discourses. Her texts celebrate the multiplicity of voices, heterodox forms and genres, inscribing gender and sexuality through subversive engagement with language. Her books and poems together with her self-stylized representation of her body as a site of signifying practices and a scene of cultural inscription form one textual "body," which serves as a locus where the cultural construction of various, conflicting identities (female/male, feminine/masculine, hetero-/homosexual) are subverted and transgressed through bodily practices.

Notes

¹ For a detailed description of Barnes's relationship to Eliot, Joyce and Pound, see Andrew Field's biography *Djuna*, 104-111. Field also quotes a letter written by Pound to Eliot in 1937, in which Pound pokes fun at Barnes by composing a limerick about her: "There once wuzza lady named Djuna,/ Who wrote rather like a baboon. Her/ Blubbery prose had no fingers or toes,/ And we wish Whale had found this out sooner" (108). The "whale" is a reference to Ford Madox Ford, who had published Barnes's work in the *Transatlantic Review*. For more information on the circle of Barnes's friends in Paris, see also Stromberg 63-89.

² In 1962 the *Selected Works of Djuna Barnes* became available and since the 1970s scholars have begun to publish book-length studies of her work. In *The Art of Djuna Barnes: Duality and Damnation* (1977), Louis Kannenstine, for instance, acknowledges that "it is indeed time to give Djuna Barnes her due, first by establishing the literary context within which her work belongs and second by recognizing its formal achievement and thematic consistency, qualities not readily apparent upon a piecemeal examination (x). Barnes has become a cult figure for feminists, Mary Lynn Broe's critical anthology *Silence and Power: A Reevaluation of Djuna Barnes* (1991) having initiated a new era in Barnes criticism.

³ Much of the criticism has taken a biographical approach to Barnes's work, taking her ambiguous statement concerning her sexual orientation, "I'm not lesbian. I just loved Thelma" (Field 37 and 101), as evidence for the sexually ambiguous characters of her texts, and arguing that Barnes's codedness and opaque style were the result of her instable sexual identity and her problems with her body. Conversely, many studies have attempted to read Barnes's texts as autobiographical, trying to determine her sexual identity with the consequence that Barnes and her texts "will once more be reduced to a cult personality, to a counter-myth in feminist couleur" (Bronfen 169). For a good overview of some biographical studies of Barnes, see Bretschneider 17-23. In my analysis of Barnes's sartorial performance, I view the name Barnes as a discursive construct, treating the above mentioned biographical details concerning her style and looks as textual representation that can be read together with her books.

⁴ In *Ladies of Fashion*, Alexandra Busch argues that apart from *Ladies Almanack*, the female body in Barnes's texts is a negative locus of female identity, a view that stems from Barnes's inability to control her body, which she gradually destroyed through her alcoholism (63-66). See also Benstock, who argues that "there is little evidence from Barnes's writing that her own body ever gave her much pleasure" (*Women* 255).

⁵ Sabine Sielke, for instance, argues that Moore in her poems camouflages the female body, using the "dazzling surface of her poems as a kind of 'martial arts' in order to construct a female subject and protect the body from the male gaze" (35).

⁶ Jay analyzes the economic and social factors that structure Barnes's satire, arguing that because of her financial problems Barnes was an outsider among the wealthy clique of American expatriates. In writing this book, Barnes "bit the very hands that brought *Ladies Almanack* into existence" (185).

⁷ The full title of the book reads: *Ladies Almanack. Showing their Signs and their tides; their Moons and their Changes; the Seasons as it is with them; their Eclipses and Equinoxes; as well as a full Record of diurnal and nocturnal Distempers written and illustrated by a Lady of Fashion.*

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The Woman and the City: The “Feminine” Body in Modern American Poetry

Piotr Zazula

Both thrilling and potentially threatening, interpersonal encounters in the modern city are often presented by 20th-century American poets as conducive to spiritual growth. The urban Other as perceived by the poetic personas of, say, T.S. Eliot, William Carlos Williams, or Allen Ginsberg constitutes both a menace and a promise. The situation is, of course, archetypal; a stranger on the horizon, whether in the street or in the wilderness, must have always evoked mixed feelings in another human being. Today's metropolitan environment, however, offers a highly intensified, extreme version of this archetypal experience. In a big city one is forced, as it were, to deal with a large number of strangers on a regular basis. After all, according to one memorable definition, a city is a settlement “in which strangers are likely to meet” (Jervis 66). Since paying attention to each person in the street is hardly possible, city-dwellers have learned to ignore the omnipresence of alien individuals, reducing the repertoire of possible interpersonal interactions to a limited number of highly conventional behaviors¹.

This social necessity has become a source of psychological tension: though conscious of the often alluring presence of the Other (a potential for a new relationship or at least an interesting experience), most urbanites feel obliged to act as if they hardly notice other people. Needless to say, the resultant standardizing of interpersonal encounters contributes to the much-lamented automatism and impersonality of metropolitan life. This paradoxical situation fosters specific, and sometimes conflicting, attitudes towards the Other, all of them easily noticeable in modern American poems featuring interpersonal encounters in an urban setting. Firstly, the daily experience of social routine combined with a constant exposure to the impersonality of the crowd encourages stereotyped thinking and sweeping generalizations about “man”. In the city it seems easier to see others in generic terms, as representatives of a species rather than as unique individualities. Secondly, while individuals merge into a depersonalized crowd, details of their appearance or attire often become more noticeable. In other

words, while usually deeming a relative or a close friend an organic and complex totality, one is more prone to regard an anonymous person as an assortment of "parts". (Thus Oscar Williams, for instance, writes an entire poem about an attractive female leg spotted on the subway train.)

Modern poets often consider it their natural duty to violate the urban routine by defamiliarizing the standard encounters between strangers. (See Ginsberg's series of questions asked of a shop assistant in a California supermarket: "Who killed the pork chops? What price bananas? Are you my Angel?"²) Being totally anonymous in a big city is often presented as a formative and liberating experience, enabling one to conduct social experiments not feasible elsewhere³.

T.S. Eliot's "Rhapsody On a Windy Night" (1917), William Carlos Williams's "The Young Housewife" (1917), and Oscar Williams's "The Leg in the Subway" (1940) amply illustrate the above-mentioned diversity of urban perspectives. Conscious of the city's ambivalent potential, the speakers of these poems offer radically different visions of urban social interactions, though all of them seem to be "othering" the encountered urbanites by projecting private axiological preconceptions on the protean metropolitan reality. Significantly, in all three poems the male speakers view the accidentally encountered *female* bodies as indicative of a *feminine* presence. This presence, both disruptive and alluring, is posited within a larger (and, as it happens, highly stereotyped) frame of reference wherein the feminine principle invariably stands for the instinctual and the carnal, permanently allotted to the realm of half-articulated desires. Still, even within these cognitive limits – probably resultant, as a feminist critic might argue, from the poets' immersion in a patriarchal culture – the three poems vary considerably in their perspective on the relation between the woman and the city.

Bitterly self-ironic and disillusioned, the speaker of "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" seems to view his urban environment in largely deterministic terms, the woman being a mere cog in the machine there, an unwitting part – and thus supporter – of the system. Reading the poem, one cannot but recall A. David Moody's comment on Eliot's *Prufrock*: "His fear is a fear of the human city and of human relations" (184). In this context, the poem's title has obviously ironic undertones. The crucial characteristic of a rhapsodic form, whether musical or poetic, is its seemingly loose, improvised structure supported by recurrent themes⁴. Indeed, Eliot's poem does read like a collection of

loosely linked imagist variations on one central theme – the sights/sites vary, but the very act of walking and the ominous presence of the street lamps remain constant. The central theme, however, hinges upon the speaker's final realization that the city is but an extended metaphor of an existential prison: there is, apparently, no escaping the automatism and predictability of human thoughts and emotions. In short, it seems ironic to produce an ostensibly improvised text with a doggedly deterministic message.

That message is signaled already in the first stanza by the street lamps' beating like "fatalistic" drums:

Twelve o'clock.
Along the reaches of the street
Held in a lunar synthesis,
Whispering lunar incantations
Dissolve the floors of memory
And all its clear relations
Its divisions and precisions,
Every street lamp that I pass
Beats like a fatalistic drum,
And through the spaces of the dark
Midnight shakes the memory
As a madman shakes a dead geranium.

The lamps' messages, as it eventually turns out, are indeed fatalistic for they all stress the automatism and predictability of both humans and animals. The similes in the second stanza (in which the door opens "like a grin" and the corner of the woman's eye "twists like a crooked pin") introduce the poem's recurrent motif – the consistent blurring of the boundary between the mechanical and the organic elements of the urban environment:

The street-lamp said, "Regard that woman
Who hesitates toward you in the light of the door
Which opens on her like a grin.
You see the border of her dress
Is torn and stained with sand,
And you see the corner of her eye
Twists like a crooked pin."

In the poem's cityscape organisms, whether feral or human, are mere mechanisms. Consequently, the child's hand in stanza four is described as "automatic":

The street-lamp said,
 "Remark the cat which flattens itself in the gutter,
 Slips out its tongue
 And devours a morsel of rancid butter."
 So the hand of the child, automatic,
 Slipped out and pocketed a toy that was running along the quay.
 I could see nothing behind that child's eye.
 I have seen eyes in the street
 Trying to peer through lighted shutters,
 And a crab one afternoon in a pool,
 An old crab with barnacles on his back,
 Gripped the end of a stick which I held him.

The speaker's position within this formidably deterministic scheme is ambiguous. On the one hand he seems to be part and parcel of the automatized, naturalistic, (in)human city, with his own memory being hopelessly lacerated and capable of generating only "twisted" things. On the other hand, however, the speaker's self-ironic stance implies a state of heightened self-awareness, thus belying his spiritual inarticulateness. In the poem's reality it is children and women who, given the emphasis on the "automatic" character of their behavior, represent the instinctual realm of largely inarticulate suffering. George Williamson's otherwise cryptic remark that "[in the poem] the woman and the moon are alike" (81) becomes clear if one remembers what the "lunar synthesis" does in Eliot's lyric; just as the essential sordidness of the city's reality becomes more apparent in the moonlight, when all the inessential details are barely visible, so the essential hopelessness of the human condition becomes more glaring if enacted by a female/feminine agent. While "the lunar spell dissolves the usual order of the memory and provides a new principle of association" (Williamson 80), the anonymous moon-lit woman acquires a symbolic significance. In this respect "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" amply illustrates the emotional distance towards the feminine principle typical of Eliot's early verse in general and of *The Waste Land* in particular. As Moody points out,

Whereas in 'Prufrock' and other early poems women were the cause of anxious fear in the male subject, in *The Waste Land* it is the women

who suffer the anxiety, while the male subject observes them in the guise of a Seer. What the various women all have in common is that they are the victims of a man's world. They have been the objects of male love and lust; and they know what it is to be unloved – to be made 'nothing'. They carry 'the burden of anxiety and fear' in the poem, and they articulate it very effectively. But they cannot be said to arrive at a detached consciousness of it. *It is the male subject who practises detachment*, and precisely from them in their suffering (185, emphasis mine).

The poem's child, then, belongs in the same province as the woman. Hence the child's hand slipping out and pocketing a toy is like the cat's tongue slipping out for food (both are automatic responses to instinctual needs), while the speaker admits he could see "nothing behind the child's eye"; the traditional window of the soul displays no view⁵.

While the child's eyes seem blank to the speaker, his own memory is on the verge of going blank too. A hodge-podge of confusing images, the man's memory can only throw up a "crowd of twisted things", a random (re)collection of unrelated and thus meaningless episodes "that concentrate the horror of life" (Williamson 81). Significantly, nature provides no relief; the moon has "lost her memory" too. To the poem's all-too-urban speaker nature seems no longer invested with a transcendental message. The landscape is, apparently, as spiritually blank as the cityscape; both have been desacralized. Memory can only help the speaker locate his apartment's door; it fails, however, to sustain a meaningful link between the past and the present.

Even the desire for interpersonal interaction – this allegedly most human of emotions – is rendered in the poem in mechanistic terms. Eyes "trying to peer through lighted shutters" are implicitly analogous to an old crab that "gripped the end of a stick" held by the speaker; the all-too-human longing for contact with others seems as automatic and predictable as the crab's response to the stick. The staple nature-culture juxtaposition has thus been rendered inconsequential. At this point John Jervis's comment on Virginia Woolf's essay "Street Haunting, A London Adventure" comes to mind: "If the modern city is a manifestation – and a manifesto – of culture against nature, it nevertheless ends up posing the same challenges as nature, and is just as recalcitrant and perplexing" (70).

In William Carlos Williams's "The Young Housewife" the psychological interaction between the speaker and the nameless

housewife seems much more complex, while the situation and the setting seem suburban rather than urban. Still, whether metropolitan or suburban, watching the pedestrians from behind the steering wheel of one's car is one of the typically urban pastimes. Moreover, if one chooses to equate the poem's speaker with William Carlos Williams, then, as Barry Ahearn reminds us,

We should remember that in the days when doctors made house calls it would have been no cause for public comment for Williams to drive freely about Rutherford. Other professional men, however, were more firmly anchored to their offices. (A few years after "The Young Housewife," Sinclair Lewis showed how quickly George Babbitt's escapes from the accustomed round of his realty business were noted.) Furthermore, the doctor has the additional privilege of entering any house in town without arousing undue suspicion among the neighbors about the motives. In short, the doctor's opportunities for surreptitious romance are greater than those of any other professional man (34).

The speaker seems to be driving at a rather leisurely pace for he has enough time to catch a little more than just a fleeting glimpse of the young housewife whose house he is passing by. Still, the whole lyric seems to be precisely an account of a momentary emotional state, a fleeting insight into the subtleties of a unique, though quotidian, encounter. Thus the poem's deceptive stylistic simplicity (no metaphors, no rhymes, no neologisms or other overtly "poetic" devices) provides a clue to its spiritual message which could be formulated as follows: If one pays attention, one will notice the mystery, uniqueness and subtlety inherent in even the most casual of encounters. As in the celebrated "Red Wheelbarrow", the boundary between the sacred and the profane, the lofty and the lowly, is purposely blurred here. What on the surface may seem perfectly plain, commonplace and quotidian contains a dramatic potential for an elevating experience. All one has to do is live attentively. Indeed, on closer inspection the apparently simple, almost austere, poem reveals intricate structural harmonies. Throughout the lyric there is a structural parallelism, particularly visible in the first two stanzas:

At ten A.M. the young housewife
moves about in negligée behind
the wooden walls of her husband's house.
I pass solitary in my car.
Then again she comes to the curb

to call the ice-man, fish-man, and stands
shy, uncorseted, tucking in
stray ends of hair, and I compare her
to a fallen leaf.

In terms of the poem's rhythm this parallelism hinges upon the counterpoint effect, in this case the marked contrast between the opening stanza's long first sentence (or, as in stanzas two and three, the initial clause of the compound sentence) and the short second sentence (or, again, clause in stanzas two and three). In all the three stanzas the shorter clauses refer directly to the speaker ("I pass solitary in my car", "I compare her / to a fallen leaf", "I bow and pass smiling"). The longer parts, in turn, refer to what the speaker sees (the housewife and her house) or, as in the final stanza, to what he can hear:

The noiseless wheels of my car
rush with a crackling sound over
dried leaves as I bow and pass smiling.

Significantly, all the aforementioned sentences have a similar syntactical structure.

The overall effect of internal order is strengthened by sound effects, especially consonance and alliteration. It is because of alliteration ("the wooden walls of her husband's house") that line 3 of the first stanza seems to stand out in the poem. This emphasis on the walls of the husband's house implies their importance to the speaker's perception of the housewife; to him this woman remains behind a barrier, inaccessible both physically and emotionally. Barriers and boundaries are important in Williams's lyric. Ahearn writes:

The poem focuses attention on various tangible barriers and containers, as if the poet were mulling over the structures that physically restrain the young housewife. The "wooden walls," for example, "of her husband's house" are the major physical barriers that hide her from the view of patrolling males, though it seems that this doctor's view has the advantage of x-ray vision, for he discerns her moving "in negligée" behind those walls. When she finally emerges, further physical limitations appear. The "curb" seems to be one barrier that marks the boundary between herself and delivery men. Another constraint is prominent by virtue of its absence: she is "uncorseted." Furthermore, the adjective beginning line 8, "stray," suggests her possible

predilection for escaping orderly confines, whether in terms of hair arrangement or in terms of more serious transgressions. The poet, too, exists in a physical container – his car (34).

It should be added, perhaps, that the two types of confinement can hardly be viewed as having equal billing. The “solitary” speaker stays, after all, within the safe, private space of his car⁶. One does not need to subscribe to Freudian psychoanalysis (the-car-as-the-emblematic-extension-of-man’s-sexual-organs spiel) to argue that in a patriarchal culture – such as that of Williams’s America – this is a predominantly “masculine”, and empowering, space. In the American suburbia of 1917 it was men who roamed the streets in search of adventure. In addition, according to Ahearn, “One consequence of Williams’s marriage was that the automobile suddenly acquired heightened importance for him. It does not figure merely as transportation. His poems frequently associate it with freedom from the ties of home and marriage” (36). All in all, the automobile’s interior provides the doctor-driver with a somewhat privileged vantage point; he can stare at the people in the street and get away with it. At the same time, however, the car precludes, or at least defers, any direct contact with others. The housewife, in turn, is first seen within the domestic space where she properly belongs. That she feels totally at home in her husband’s house is suggested in the text by the contrast between her relaxed ways inside the house (where she “moves about in negligée”) and her marked vulnerability outside the domestic space; on the sidewalk she is “shy” and reminiscent of a “fallen leaf”, an object that has been separated from its natural and nurturing habitat. The husband’s house, then, may stand for both shelter and confinement.

Having compared the housewife to a fallen leaf, the driver proceeds to run over some dried leaves strewn on the street. His momentarily increased aural sensitivity to the “crackling” sound of the crushed leaves is probably due to the comparison he has just made. The otherwise perfectly realistic episode acquires emblematic connotations in the speaker’s mind. Likewise, the reader intuitively makes the connection between the driver’s unwitting running over the leaves and his, equally unintended, encroachment upon the unknown woman’s privacy. The wheels crushing the leaves with automatic indiscriminateness are at this point emblematic of the driver’s equally unintended violation of the housewife’s fragile domesticity. We are never told explicitly what it was that the driver experienced in that brief, wordless encounter with

the housewife. Two emotional states, however, seem to be definitely there: compassion and an unqualified, somewhat puzzling sense of guilt on the part of the driver. Compassion is clearly hinted at in the second stanza by the speaker's perceptive and sympathetic appraisal of the woman's temporary feeling of uneasiness and his subsequent act of comparing her to a fallen leaf. Given the emotional ambiguity of the whole situation, it is not surprising that critics interpret it in different ways. Barry Ahearn, for instance, writes:

"Fallen," of course, is a term that evokes a number of sexual references – especially to ladies of easy virtue. And the suggestion that the housewife is a leaf carries with it the traditional references to the fleeting life of vegetation as an analogy for human life. But the appearance of "dried leaves" crushed by the "noiseless wheels" of the doctor's car equally as well suggest the noiseless wings of devouring Time and the ephemeral nature of the merely physical. The faint presence of the two contradictory traditions [of *carpe diem* and *memento mori*] mingling in the poem reflects the contrary impulses (desire vs. fear of scandal) that move the poet (35-36).

This may well be so, but the critic plays down at this point the logic of the poem, its specific frame of reference. The housewife is compared to a fallen leaf only while standing at the curb, "shy, uncorseted" and trying to look respectable ("tucking in / stray ends of hair"). Like a leaf separated from its tree, the housewife, once isolated from her natural domain, seems particularly vulnerable.

The driver's vague sense of guilt is, as already noted, implied by his increased aural acuity in the last stanza. Viewed in this context, his final act of conventional politeness (bowing accompanied by smiling) may be interpreted as an unconventional apology – expressed via an all-too-conventional gesture – for unintended peeking that might have compounded the housewife's embarrassment.

The speaker's mental state is, as already mentioned, a complex one and thus open to diverse interpretations. Ahearn emphasizes the latent eroticism of the wordless encounter between the "patrolling" doctor and the "uncorseted" housewife:

That the doctor entertains thoughts about some sort of convergence with the young housewife appears in the parallels between the two of them. In the first stanza the state of the young housewife being left alone in "her husband's house" makes the poet aware of his similar position: "I pass solitary in my car." The housewife's self-consciousness

about her appearance in the second stanza is echoed in the doctor's self-consciousness about his art: "I compare her. . . ." There is outward turning in this poem – the woman leaves the house and encounters other males, the doctor frequently leaves his home to call on women who need his professional services – but there is also inward turning; the woman toward her appearance, the poet toward his art. (Note the parallelism of roles: she emerges as a housewife but also meets people at the curb as an object of desire; he passes by as a doctor, but also as a poet.) Finally, the meeting of housewife and doctor is defused of sexual anxiety by the doctor's slightly pompous and ridiculous final act: "I bow and pass smiling." The courtly bow he exhibits at the close can only be executed with difficulty from the seat of a moving car" (35).

Whatever label one decides to put on that ambivalent mixture of compassion, tenderness, sexual attraction, and guilt felt by the poem's speaker, one thing seems certain: the driver's complex, though transient, emotional state has been facilitated by his urban environment. The possible interpretations of the poem's final message are many. The speaker, for instance, may have realized that it is hardly possible to travel in the city (suburbia or not) without interacting with other people, however unwittingly. In other words, in a metropolis one never knows when and how one's actions, or even one's mere act of looking at someone, may affect another person's feelings. Therefore, one had better be careful and attentive.

Obviously, the poem also invites another reading, namely as a deliberately understated account of a missed opportunity: "The encounter between the passing doctor and the young housewife is scrupulously polite and legitimate. Yet the poem hints at potential sexual contact" (Ahearn 34). The driver has spotted a woman with whom he seems to have some sort of temporary emotional bond. Whatever his feelings towards the housewife, she has definitely attracted his attention and aroused his compassion. Yet, he does not stop – he never gets out of the car to meet her. His final nod and smile seem somewhat paltry acts, compared to what is going on in his head. The discrepancy between the subtlety of the driver's feelings and the conventionality of his behavior is obviously, and thus purposely, jarring. Williams' poem exposes one of the chief paradoxes of urban relations: being the source of countless social opportunities, the city is by the same token the source of countless disappointments. The city arouses

our expectations concerning other people, but also teaches us how to suppress them.

Whatever our interpretation of the final scene, one thing seems certain: in "The Young Housewife" the city offers the driver a unique opportunity to feel compassion for a stranger, to establish an unspoken, transient rapport with an anonymous human being. As theologians tell us, that state is a preliminary step in the mystic's journey towards enlightenment.

Oscar Williams's poem also ends with an insight, though of an entirely different order. "The Leg in the Subway" is, in its very form, a clear reference to Walt Whitman's rhapsodic verse. The long lines, the accentual rhythm, the anaphoric repetitions, and the syntactical parallelisms are all reminiscent of "Song of Myself", anticipating, by the same token, the incantatory cadences of Allen Ginsberg (Williams' poem was published in 1940). However, given the speaker's uneasy self-consciousness and his attendant observance of the social decorum (he neither accosts nor follows the woman whose leg he has surreptitiously admired), the stylistic reference to Whitman seems self-ironic. In short, Oscar Williams' speaker exudes neither the ecstatic elation nor the cosmic cool typical of Whitman's rhapsodic free verse. Unlike the mystic of "Song of Myself", the commuting urbanite from "The Leg in the Subway" never works himself into frenzied, joyous abandon:

The long tongue of the earth's speed was licking the leg,

...

It drank moment, lit shivers of insecurity in niches between bones:

It was full of eyes, it stopped licking to look at the passengers:

Whitman's speaker, in turn, though also "full of eyes", would, needless to say, never have bothered to "look at the passengers" to make sure nobody has noticed his peeking. Thus it is the clash between the Whitmanian style and the effete intellectual's self-ironic perspective that sustains the central dramatic conflict in Williams's poem. (At this point the situation is reminiscent of the aforementioned clash between the rhapsodic form and the deterministic message of the Eliot text.)

The emotional rift in the speaker's mind between reason and instinct, or between the social and the instinctual self, is further emphasized by the structure of the poem, neatly divided into four parts, slightly different in style if not in tone. The first section serves as a rational

introduction to the frenzied vision that follows. "This is what I saw", the speaker declares at the end of this introductory part, thus clearly marking the point of transition from reality to fantasy. Significantly, the subsequent two sections teem with metaphors, thus emphasizing the highly subjective and contrived character of the speaker's perspective⁷. The final section, though also heavily metaphoric, is detached and explanatory in tone and hence comparable to the first one. In short, the speaker's experience, however intense, is divided, framed, and made sense of by an ostensibly analytical mind.

The poem's final metaphors aptly visualize its central message, the ultimate meaning of the speaker's insight. Having realized that civilization is "as dark as a wood and dimensional with things" the poem's narrator now sees how "birds dipped in chromium" sing in "the crevices of our deeds". In other words, he has seen how civilization's artifacts – such as metropolitan subways – can generate some inscrutably wild emotional states. The symbolic image of "birds dipped in chromium" could stand for the conflicting but intricate merger of nature and culture, or the organic and the mechanical, that seems to define humans as a species. Their "singing" in the "crevices of our deeds" might be the poet's way of saying that all our motives derive from this central internal contradiction, which truth, however, manifests itself only when the true, and often unrealized, motives of our actions are accidentally revealed, that is when the thin veneer of culture cracks, exposing the creative instinctual chaos lurking underneath.

The speaker's voyeuristic encounter with a stranger on the subway train is, obviously, a specifically urban experience. As already indicated, the urbanites' anonymity in the crowd encourages a specific type of spectatorial attitude, a fragmentation of perspective, a focus on details that are often endowed with aesthetic autonomy. (Hence, it is possible to admire a detail of clothing or anatomy on an otherwise unattractive person.) One might even argue that the resultant fetishization of selected elements of clothing and the iconization of selected parts of the body – what John Jervis calls the "fetishistic fragmentation and decomposition of the body" (84) – constitute staple constituents of the metropolitan experience:

Clothes as a 'second skin' . . . take on the fetishistic allure of body parts, testifying to the immersion of selfhood in the objects and vestments that may do more than just provide cover for it, but may enter into its constitution, becoming part of the web of fantasy and desire

central to the modern self in its problematical relation to the body (Jervis 118).

The lesson the speaker learns is that of his own susceptibility to largely uncontrollable drives. Brigid Brophy once referred to the city as "one of the great indispensable devices of civilization (itself only a device for centralizing beauty and transmitting it as a heritage)" (169). In the three poems discussed above it seems that the city is primarily a device for intensifying the emotional impact of interpersonal encounters.

Notes

¹ The interactions with strangers are always heavily ritualistic, even in the cities usually associated with multiculturalism and spontaneity. Thus New York, the apparent epitome of cultural contingency, is also a city of well-established "street codes", so to speak. In Paul Auster's *The Moon Palace* the narrator-agent notices that seasoned New Yorkers, though invariably unimpressed by even the most extravagant, exotic, or provocative outfits donned by metropolitan eccentrics in the streets, can get easily alarmed by any unconventional behavior in the streets. Thus, Auster tells us, it is not so much the clothes but what one does inside these clothes that is subject to a rather strict code of acceptable and unacceptable/"abnormal" (i.e. potentially dangerous) behavior in New York City.

² Ginsberg, Allen, "A Supermarket in California" (1956), *The Harper American Literature*, ed. D. McQuade et al, vol. 2 (New York: Harper & Row) 1994.

³ "Hence Baudelaire's celebrated demand that the poet pick up his halo from the gutter, and his contribution to what Elizabeth Wilson has called 'an aesthetic of the ugly', whereby poets and novelists have found in 'the very ugliness and squalor of those cities a melancholy, perverse beauty and eroticism'. In doing this, the artist can avoid being trapped in the deadening utilitarianism of project, the bourgeois subordination of everyday life to material goal, of experience to purpose, and can reclaim the sense that life is 'rich in poetic and marvellous subjects. The marvellous envelops and soaks us like an atmosphere, but we don't see it'" (Jervis 68).

⁴ In ancient Greece a rhapsodist was "an itinerant minstrel who recited epic poetry. Part came from memory, part was improvised. A rhapsodist was thus a poet who 'stitched' together various elements" (Cuddon 570). Eliot's poem, then, has a title which is both deceptive and ironic, a title that, as George Williamson points out, "in music suggests a composition of enthusiastic character but indefinite form. But if we take it as an effusion marked by extravagance of idea and expression, and without connected thought, we shall be coming short of the mark. This rhapsody has method enough; it concerns a windy night on a street 'held in a lunar synthesis,' and the speaker is returning to his lodgings. The lunar spell dissolves the usual order of the memory and provides a new principle of association; then time successively shakes the memory in an irrational but symbolic fashion, producing in each instance a synthesis which is both an emotion and a comment. The 'lunar synthesis' gives a different ordering of things: the daily synthesis appears only at the end" (80).

⁵ At this point I find it hard to agree with Francis Scarfe, who states that "there is no clue, for the intelligent reader, as to the connection between the cat and the child. All this is shorthand précis of Baudelaire's prose-poem 'Le Joujou du pauvre'. Baudelaire compared the poor child receiving a toy, with 'les chats qui vont manger loin de vous le morceau que vous leur avez donné', then went on to show how the rich child might well envy the toys of the poor, which are living things; 'Or, ce joujou, que le petit souillon . . . secouait dans une boîte grillée, c'était un rat vivant!' Thus the 'toy that was running along the quay' was a rat or a mouse" (50). Scarfe is surely right when pointing out the borrowings from Baudelaire, but he ignores Eliot's creative adaptation of the scene to his own poetic purposes. The parallels between the cat's and the child's equally automatic behavior seem explicit enough. George Williamson, among others, acknowledges the connection when, in his discussion of the "human machines" in *The Waste Land*, he notes that the much-quoted "automatic hand" has "already appeared, with a similar implication, in 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night'" (143).

⁶ "Carl Rapp notes that the automobile in Williams's work represents a poet's freedom [96]. But it can also suggest certain limitations, such as the obligations and responsibilities that go with the profession that makes owning a car necessary. . . . One indication of Williams's interest in the world as a place where things are in motion is the early appearance of automobiles in his poetry. Not only are they ubiquitous in his work, his are among the first poems in English to admit motor vehicles as worthy of poetic consideration" (Ahearn 168).

⁷ Charles Altieri rightly notices that in lyric poetry metaphoric styles usually have "self-reflexive implications" (51).

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APPENDIX

T.S. Eliot

Rhapsody on a Windy Night

Twelve o'clock.
Along the reaches of the street
Held in a lunar synthesis,
Whispering lunar incantations
Dissolve the floors of memory
And all its clear relations
Its divisions and precisions,
Every street lamp that I pass
Beats like a fatalistic drum,
And through the spaces of the dark
Midnight shakes the memory
As a madman shakes a dead geranium.

Half-past one,
The street-lamp sputtered,
The street-lamp muttered,
The street-lamp said, "Regard that woman
Who hesitates toward you in the light of the door
Which opens on her like a grin.
You see the border of her dress
Is torn and stained with sand,
And you see the corner of her eye
Twists like a crooked pin."

The memory throws up high and dry
A crowd of twisted things,
A twisted branch upon the beach
Eaten smooth, and polished
As if the world gave up
The secret of its skeleton,
Stiff and white.
A broken spring in a factory yard,

Rust that clings to the form that the strength has left
Hard and curled and ready to snap.

Half-past two,
The street-lamp said,
"Remark the cat which flattens itself in the gutter,
Slips out its tongue
And devours a morsel of rancid butter."
So the hand of the child, automatic,
Slipped out and pocketed a toy that was running along the quay.
I could see nothing behind that child's eye.
I have seen eyes in the street
Trying to peer through lighted shutters,
And a crab one afternoon in a pool,
An old crab with barnacles on his back,
Gripped the end of a stick which I held him.

Half-past three,
The lamp sputtered,
The lamp muttered in the dark.
The lamp hummed:
"Regard the moon,
La lune ne garde aucune rancune,
She winks a feeble eye,
She smiles into corners.
She smoothes the hair of the grass.
The moon has lost her memory.
A washed-out smallpox cracks her face,
Her hand twists a paper rose,
That smells of dust and eau de Cologne,
She is alone
With all the old nocturnal smells
That cross and cross across her brain."
The reminiscence comes
Of sunless dry geraniums
And dust in crevices,
Smells of chestnuts in the streets,
And female smells in shuttered rooms,
And cigarettes in corridors
And cocktail smells in bars.

The lamp said,
"Four o'clock,
Here is the number on the door.
Memory!
You have the key,
The little lamp spreads a ring on the stair.
Mount.
The bed is open; the tooth-brush hangs on the wall,
Put your shoes at the door, sleep, prepare for life."

The last twist of the knife.

William Carlos Williams

The Young Housewife

At ten A.M. the young housewife
moves about in negligée behind
the wooden walls of her husband's house.
I pass solitary in my car.

Then again she comes to the curb
to call the ice-man, fish-man, and stands
shy, uncorseted, tucking in
stray ends of hair, and I compare her
to a fallen leaf.

The noiseless wheels of my car
rush with a crackling sound over
dried leaves as I bow and pass smiling.

Oscar Williams**The Leg in the Subway**

When I saw the woman's leg on the floor of the subway train,
Protrude beyond the panel (while her body overflowed my mind's eye),
When I saw the pink stocking, black shoe, curve bulging with warmth,
The delicate etching of the hair behind the flesh-colored gauze,
When I saw the ankle of Mrs. Nobody going nowhere for a nickel,
When I saw this foot motionless on the moving motionless floor,
My mind caught on a nail of a distant star, I was wrenched out
Of the reality of the subway ride, I hung in a socket of distance: and
this is what I saw:

The long tongue of the earth's speed was licking the leg,
Upward and under and around went the long tongue of speed:
It was made of flesh invisible, it dripped the saliva of miles:
It drank moment, lit shivers of insecurity in niches between bones:
It was full of eyes, it stopped licking to look at the passengers:
It was as alive as a worm, and busier than anybody in the train:
It spoke saying: To whom does this leg belong? Is it a bonus leg
For the rush hour? Is it a forgotten leg? Among the many
Myriads of legs did an extra leg fall in from the Out There?

O Woman, sliced off bodily by the line of the panel, shall I roll
Your leg into the abdominal nothing, among digestive teeth?
Or shall I fit it in with the pillars that hold up the headlines?
But nobody spoke, though all the faces were talking silently,
As the train zoomed, a zipper closing up swiftly the seam of time.

Alas, said the long tongue of the speed of the earth quite faintly,
What is one to do with an incorrigible leg that will not melt -
But everybody stopped to listen to the train vomiting cauldrons
Of silence, while somebody's jolted-out afterthought trickled down
The blazing shirt-front solid with light bulbs, and just then
The planetary approach of the next station exploded atoms of light,
And when the train stopped, the leg had grown a surprising mate,
And the long tongue had slipped hurriedly out through a window:

I perceived through the hole left by the nail of the star in my mind
How civilization was as dark as a wood and dimensional with things
And how birds dipped in chromium sang in the crevices of our deeds.

The Surrender of the Body in Mary Oliver and Amy Clampitt's Ecopoetry

Martina Antretter

Since its beginnings in the 1970s, the field of ecocriticism, or "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty xviii), has been associated with the feminist movement. Ecofeminism – the fusion of ecocritical and feminist scholarship¹ – is concerned with the analysis of the traditional image of nature-as-woman and its concomitant connections with the oppression of women and the environment. In her influential essay "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" the anthropologist Sherry B. Ortner explains that the association of woman with the lower end of the nature/culture paradigm automatically assigns her a secondary position within the dualistic system of patriarchy. She argues that humanity, equated with the concept of "culture," is identified with men, while woman's body, her role as mother and even her emotions bring her closer to "nature." According to such a scheme, dominion over nature (perceived as female) and women is justified, since it perpetuates culture, the superior realm to which men belong.²

There are feminists who disagree with the practice of relating women to nature.³ Val Plumwood explains that "[t]he very idea of a feminine connection with nature seems to many to be regressive and insulting, summoning up images of women as earth mothers, as passive, reproductive animals, contented cows immersed in the body" (20). Ecofeminists, however, argue that a critical revision of this trope is necessary to come to an understanding of women's difference. An ecological feminist position would then challenge the dominant hierarchically structured model of (masculine) society. This project entails a re-evaluation of the belief in the inferior status of the non-human world and the conception of women as fully human beings, equal to men.⁴

With the foundation of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ALSE), the acknowledgment of ecocriticism by the Modern Language Association and the foundation of the journal *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* (ISLE) in the

mid-1990s, the focus on the interconnections between women and non-human nature made its appearance in literature. Ecofeminist literary critics are concerned with discussing the symbolism that links women and nature. What tropes are used to establish the woman-nature interconnection? Do they perpetuate, subvert or reconfigure the concept of "nature as nurture" (Merchant 2)?

Against the postmodern doubt about the possibility of representing ideas about human relationships to nature through language, there is a revival of interest in nature especially among writers of creative non-fiction and poetry. Writings about nature by contemporary poets can be described as espousing the oppositional tendency to return to nature on the one hand, and the ways in which poets invent new ways of addressing nature on the other. Bonnie Costello argues that the "impulse to return to nature as a retreat from cultural excess persists in the literary imagination" (571) among poets she calls "primitivists" or "poets of place" (572). And there are those poets who "take nature as a concept itself unfixed" (570) and who establish new ways of entering into contact with nature.⁵

The contemporary "primitivist" poet Mary Oliver is known for engaging the human in celebrations of the wonders and pain of nonhuman nature. By affirming the human body and conceiving it in terms equal to the human spirit, she challenges dichotomies which privilege mind over matter. In "Poem," she announces this central concern by asserting that "[the spirit] needs / the metaphor of the body," and that "it needs the body's world" (*Dream Work* 52). Oliver shifts the idea of the human body from the human context to the conceptually connected context of the body of nature. As we shall see, in both cases that body is gendered "female."

Among the French feminists who in their critical approach align themselves with the bodily experience of women as a means of defining female subjectivity, Hélène Cixous' theory of the voice as a particular instance of feminine discourse is particularly interesting. Cixous is haunted by the image of woman as non-being. In "Sorties" she argues that in the hierarchical binary system that dominates our culture, woman symbolizes the passive, supportive, emotional. It is a scheme that privileges man and swallows up the female in its shadow. Smashed by the power of a phallogocentric worldview, the female shamefully hides behind the dominant male principle and is relegated to a position that is not truly hers. Thus woman withdraws from Cixous' field of view.

"Where is she?" (66), Cixous cries out in exasperation while surveying the ruins of the "universal battlefield" (67) of an incompatible couple unable to conceive of a system of equal relations, seemingly sacrificing everything to the destructive hierarchical order. But she can find her again by creating a language that is true to the nature of female subjectivity. Although there is resistance on behalf of Cixous to the theoretical description of what she calls "Writing Femininity Transformation" (68), the extra-phallogocentric territory in which it takes place can be visited.

It is her theory of the voice as a particular instance of female discourse and its realization through the medium of the body, which is appropriate for the analysis of the ecopoetry of Mary Oliver. Cixous argues that the order of feminine writing is imaginary; it is dominated by the figure of the mother. And it is manifest in language through the mediation of the body. By "writing the body," a specifically feminine writing is implemented: "Listen to woman speak in gathering," Cixous writes,

she doesn't "speak," she throws her trembling body into the air, she lets herself go . . . she goes completely into her voice, she vitally defends the "logic" of her discourse with her body. (233)

Female discourse exceeds phallogocentric thinking and foregrounds voice as a privileged site of "conveying meaning with the body" (233). The concepts of writing and voice are intertwined with the idea that the Voice has its powerful origins in what Cixous poetically describes as "the deepest, the oldest, the loveliest Visitation" (234). It is the force of the mother, which is conceived as an essential driving force of *feminine écriture*.

In Mary Oliver we witness the tendency to abandon a stance according to which the world is viewed in anthropocentric terms towards the creation of a new and exciting identity achieved through the surrender of the human body to the natural world. Among her fantasies about fusing psychological attitudes with representations of the body in nature is the desire to return to a maternal nature. One can argue here that the visionary direction pursued by Oliver (though herself not a feminist) has much in common with Hélène Cixous' voice-body-mother triad. Cixous writes:

Text, my body: traversed by lilting flows; listen to me, it is not a captivating, clinging "mother"; it is the equivocation that, touching you, affects you, pushes you away from your breast to come to language . . . it is the rhyt-me that laughs you; the one intimately addressed who makes all the metaphors, allbody(?) – bodies (?) possible. (234)

In a number of poems, Mary Oliver turns her attention to the "equivocation," the mythic lost mother who is the central source of femininity and female writing. Again and again, the female physical subject seeks to meet the lost mother. The body longs to return to maternal earth. The poem "Sleeping in the Forest" (*New and Selected Poems* 181), for example, is controlled by the already mentioned image of "nature as nurture." Carolyn Merchant characterizes it further as the ancient identification of "nature, especially the earth, with a nurturing mother: a kindly beneficent female who provide[s] for the needs of mankind" (2). It is this kind of earth-mother which Oliver evokes in the lines

I thought the earth
remembered me, she
took me back so tenderly, arranging
her dark skirts, her pockets
full of lichens and seeds.

The lyrical "I" describes the return to maternal anthropomorphized nature, nestling comfortably in the latter's body. The iambic rhythm that dominates the first three lines of the poem (which gets lost in the course of it) and the quadruple rhyme between the phrases "remembered me" and "so tenderly" evoke the pleasurable relation to "mother." In the poem "The Sea" from the Pulitzer Prize-winning poetry book *American Primitive* (1983) the speaker discovers her self by returning, again, to the maternal body. This time she is immersed in the depths of the sea, which we can interpret as a metaphorical rendering of the mother's womb. The poem opens with the speaker swimming in the sea. With each stroke she "remembers that life and cries for / the lost parts of itself –":

Stroke by
stroke my
body remembers that life and cries for
the lost parts of itself (*American Primitive* 69)

The capital "S" in the first word of the poem, the two-syllable rhyme between "Stroke by / stroke my" and the use of consonance announce the speaker's returning memories of her first home, the mother's uterus. Then, the speaker turns into a fish ("my legs / want to lock and become / one muscle") and finally settles in the mother's womb:

Sprawled
in that motherlap,
in that dreamhouse
of salt and exercise,
what spillage
of nostalgia pleads
from the very bones! (*American Primitive* 69-70)

It is an experience of intense bliss to retreat into the maternal matrix. The speaker who is "Sprawled / in that motherlap" completely and trustingly opens herself up to the mother. The process of diving into the mother's womb is visually represented by the rhythmic flow of indented irregular lines, which is not interrupted by stanza breaks.

It has been mentioned that some feminists meet the return to nature as a counter-reaction to patriarchy with skepticism. After all, the association of woman with nature has justified the domination of nature and women in the past. I would argue that Mary Oliver's explicit invocations of the traditional image of nature as a nurturing mother do not undermine women's project of self-definition and self-extraction from the oppressive system of patriarchy. In her poetry, nature, though it is clearly gendered, is not at all portrayed as a passive recipient of male conquest and domination. Oliver convincingly comes up with new metaphors that are potentially liberating. Apart from metaphors invoking motherhood, she employs tropes that express the merging of human physicality with nature's creatures or nature's elements. Such depictions defy the allegedly patriarchal boundaries between self and nature, soul and body, subject and object. In the poem "August" (*American Primitive* 3) the unthinking yet finite self is carried to the infinite timeless other realm through the metaphorical ritual of an incorporation. The poet writes: "When the blackberries hang / swollen in the woods, in the brambles / nobody owns, I spend all day among the high / branches, reaching my ripped arms, thinking / of nothing." And then, voraciously, the speaker "cram[s] / the black honey of summer / into [her] mouth." Through the act of incorporating nature's juicy fruits,

the speaker celebrates a union with nature, which makes the body surface; it now assumes the function of consciousness. The body/mind duality is overcome. The "body / accepts what it is." When Oliver uses the metonymical expression "thick paw of my life" towards the end of the poem, we know that now the subject is governed by the principle of the animal.

Underneath the chain of transformations that occur once the "I" of the poem acknowledges its own physicality and immerses her self in nature is an undercurrent of eroticism. Catrin Gersdorf points out that the erotic is a "feasible concept to rethink the human place in nature and to change culture's fatal will to master nature into a will to know it lovingly" (180). The erotic can be a life force and an instrument of power for women. As such it is described in the poem "The Honey Tree" (*American Primitive* 81). The specific nature of sexual discovery the speaker embarks on is not evident. It might be autoerotic, heterosexual or homosexual. In any case, one can argue that the female subject makes the phallic principle her own. This is supported by the visual representation of the poem as a column, the phallic connotation of the tree image, the human derived natural imagery ("dark hair of the leaves," "the thighs of bees," "the body of the tree") and the frequent images of ingestion ("I . . . ate / the bodies of bees that could not / get out of my way . . . ate / the dark hair of the leaves"). This is an autonomous representation of sexuality, which leads the speaker to conclude:

Oh, anyone can see
how I love myself at last!
how I love the world!

* * *

In an age characterized by the subdual state of nature, the contemplation of the human/non-human boundary is inevitably deprived of its former idealist stance. Bonnie Costello asserts that poets who adjust to the diminished status of "modern" nature "have more to tell us about the possibilities for our relation to nature than do the latter-day Romanticists, primitivists, and 'poets of place' and mystical presence who are usually celebrated by ecologically oriented critics" (572). Costello is interested in the ways in which these poets⁶ experiment with finding definitions of "nature" and concludes that they ultimately "take

nature as a concept itself unfixed" (570). Likewise, she sees Amy Clampitt's poems on vacant lots as explorations of the meaning of such wrecked natural sites being reclaimed by nature as opposed to the constructed industrial scene.⁷

In contrast to Mary Oliver, Amy Clampitt is indeed no longer sure if the concept of nature can be taken as a locus or metaphorical matrix of mystical union with nature. But it undeniably occupies a central position in her poetics as a source of meaning and value. What Amy Clampitt proposes is a newly gathered focus on a wilderness that is supplanted by the landscapes of civilization and urbanization. More than often, I would argue, this focus implies the notion of the uncanny: her speakers' encounters with nature are transfigured into a dream-like, unreal vision.

Amy Clampitt is known for putting emphasis in her descriptions of nature on desolate European landscapes and to roam, in her imagination, the landscapes of the American continent. The extreme sensibility to space and place is revealed in imagery that seeks to yoke meaning from unusual, bleak and forgotten sites, for example in her series of poems dedicated to the vacant lots just mentioned or to the ostensibly dead landscapes of Greece, Italy and the Midwest.⁸ For example, in the poem "The Outer Bar" (which appeared in *The Kingfisher* in 1983), Amy Clampitt asks the reader to consider new dimensions of the human/non-human encounter. According to Clampitt, the subject of her poem is the "expedition to a bar island off the coast of Maine, as recalled in midwinter" (*Collected Poems* 435).⁹ It begins with the speaker wading in the "luscious mess" of a "shadow isthmus," that is, a narrow area of shallow water connecting the main land with the island. The aim of this expedition is an encounter with the elements; the speaker is preparing for "an unplanned, headily illicit interview" by summoning up all available bodily strength:

you find yourself, once over, sinking at every step
into a luscious mess –

a vegetation of unbarbered, virgin, foot-thick
velvet, the air you breathe an aromatic
thicket, odors in confusion starting up
At every step like partridges

or schools of fishes, an element you swim through

as to an unplanned, headily illicit
interview. (Collected Poems 9)

Just as Clampitt's "labyrinthine syntax" (Corn 30) coils and uncoils, the speaker thrusts her/himself – both bodily and psychically – into the uncanny experience of encountering "paradise," which lurks inside a "prison rockpile." This meeting with nature, pursued through "some lacuna, chink, or interstice," makes clear that the environment Clampitt constructs is not only a surface concept and is not entirely devoid of metaphysical meaning. In this particular human encounter with nature, the speaker pursues with the imagination things of nature until s/he is able to catch up with them. With her highly sophisticated rhetorical mode Clampitt is able to establish a connection that indicates a new reference, a new ground for getting in touch with the non-human. Nature, in the end, *does* issue forth a response: The "interview" with nature contains a warning and impels the speaker to retreat.

The light out there, gashed
by the surf's scimitar,

is blinding, a rebuke – Go back! Go back! - (Collected Poems 9)

Although our efforts to view Clampitt's descriptions of nature as gendered are met with resistance, we do find in her nature poetry a desire to extricate meaning from her environs by involving both mind and the body in this quest. Though drained of the mystical and gendered meanings Oliver attaches to nature, Clampitt constructs a natural environs whose dynamism she can glean if aided by physicality – her own and that of nature. As described in the poem "Man Feeding Pigeons" (first published in *Archaic Figure* in 1987), the mind of the poet is concentrated on "the form of the thing" or the shape of a school of pigeons. As these concluding lines reveal, human perception again needs to be brought in accord with the body in nature in order for it to gain a glimpse of paradise. Although the speaker is not sure what to associate with the birds he is feeding and what to call them ("if a thing is what it was"), bringing it in some kind of accord with the body of nature promises a glimpse of what paradise (the "paradisal rose") can be:

it was the form
 of the thing, if a thing is what it was,
 and not the merest wisp of a part of
 a process – this unraveling inkling
 of the envisioned, of states of being
 past alteration, of all that we've
 never quite imagined except by way of
 the body: the winged proclamations,
 the wheelings, the stairways, the
 vast, concentric, paradisaal rose. (Collected Poems 263)

Notes

¹ The term ecofeminism was first introduced by the radical feminist D'Eaubonne in her book *Feminism or Death* (1974). An English translation of the chapter "The Time for Ecofeminism" is available in Merchant, ed., *Ecology: Key Concepts in Critical Theory*.

² Cf. Ortner's essay. In *The Death of Nature*, Carolyn Merchant discusses the move from an organic theory, which identifies nature with Mother Earth or the witch (symbolizing the violence of nature), to a "mechanically oriented mentality that either eliminated or used female principles in an exploitive manner" (2). Similarly, Annette Kolodny, in *The Lay of the Land*, argues that the conception of the land as nurturing or seductive female body justified its mastery and conquest.

³ For example, by using various voices – a paternal voice, the narrator's voice, the voices of other women, and the voice of nature – Susan Griffin, in *Woman and Nature*, explores the woman-as-nature trope, ultimately acknowledging the feminine tie with nature: "We know ourselves to be made from this earth. We know this earth is made from our bodies. For we see ourselves. And we are nature. We are nature seeing nature. We are nature with a concept of nature" (227).

⁴ For an excellent philosophical discussion of ecofeminism, see the chapter "Feminism and Ecofeminism" in Plumwood's *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*.

⁵ The poets of place Bonnie Costello names are Robinson Jeffers, William Carlos Williams, Gary Snyder, Ted Hughes, Robert Bly, David Waggoner, W.S. Merwin, Mary Oliver, Wendell Berry, and Donald Hall (cf. 571). The second category of poets, advocating a "latter-day poetics of superfluity" (570), includes poets Wallace Stevens, John Ashbery, Derek Walcott, Jorie Graham, Charles Wright, Amy Clampitt and A.R. Ammons (cf. 572).

⁶ See endnote 5.

⁷ "Vacant Lot with Tumbleweed and Pigeons" (*Collected Poems* 172), "Vacant Lot with Pokeweed" (*Collected Poems* 329); a detailed discussion of Clampitt's use of the word "vacant" can be found in Costello.

⁸ In the chapter "Amy Clampitt's United States" of his book *Modern Poetry after Modernism*, James Longenbach describes the influence of European landscapes on Clampitt's descriptions of American natural sites (the coast of Maine, Iowa and the West Coast) by juxtaposing it to Henry James' European experience.

⁹ Amy Clampitt is fond of supplying the reader with additional information about some of her poems. Here she defines the subject of the poem "The Outer Bar" and adds a precise description of the setting by quoting from an entry in a newspaper. She writes: "Of the particular island Louise Dickinson Rich wrote in *The Peninsula* (Chatham-Viking, 1958, 1971, p. 152): 'When there's an unusually low run of tide it's possible to get over there by walking across the exposed sand bar to Inner Bar Island and then scrambling ankle-deep along a rocky reef to outer Bar. But you can't stay very long. The minute the tide turns you have to start back. If you wait too long you're going to be stuck out there for twelve hours, or until the next low tide; that is, unless you can attract the attention of a passing lobsterman who will take you off'" (*Collected Poems* 435).

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Violence in American Opera from the 1900s through the 1950s

Klaus-Dieter Gross

I

European operatic history abounds with violence: *Don Giovanni*, of 1787, opens with on-stage murder and develops from attempted rape through misuses of power to the destruction of the title figure, in 1814, *Fidelio* deals with torture, as does *Tosca* in 1900, *Les Huguenots*, of 1836, is about political violence, *Faust* (1859) shows the suffering of an abused girl who kills her new-born child and herself, ethnic turbulence is the basis for *Aida* (1871) and *Carmen* (1875). In any case the violent acts are at the heart of the plots, as source of action, turning point, or result, and thus are directly linked with the fate of the hero or heroine. Without the violent core the basic story line could not work.

American opera was utterly late in becoming independent of European patterns.¹ The format was too distant from American auto-stereotypes. It was impractical, functioned as an anti-democratic status-marker for the metropolitan plutocracies, and was overshadowed by the ballad and light opera tradition and vaudeville or musical comedies.² When American composers did attempt indigenous music drama, it was often modeled after European patterns and detached from the contemporary U.S.A.: Horatio Parker's *Mona* (1911), for example, staged the fights between the ancient Britons and Romans.

The only field in which American experiences were productive was the frontier and Indian opera. Walter Damrosch tried his hand at early Puritan intolerance in *The Scarlet Letter* (1896). Frederic Converse's *The Sacrifice* (1911) staged the gruesome life of gold-rush California. Mary Carr Moore's *Narcissa* (1911) dealt with natives who fight back missionaries on the Oregon frontier of the 1830s. In Charles Wakefield Cadman's *Shanewis, or the Robin Woman* (1918) the main character is the Indian protégée of a rich Californian lady whose daughter is engaged to a young man who again has fallen in love with the heroine and follows her to the reservation; he is finally killed by the bow and arrow of her Indian lover.³ In all cases the sets and scenes are American,

yet their nostalgic impetus and formal characteristics remain confined to the standards of European romantic opera.

A more innovative work is Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha* (1915), which addresses the matter of black liberation and modernization in an all-black community immediately after the Civil War.⁴ Joplin topicalized the tensions within the community by having his heroine abducted by reactionary conjurors. Violence is highly stylized, and in the end most, if in no way all, cruel enemies are won over. Although the work was not produced before the 1970s, it is striking that the plot of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* includes a similar abduction of a woman by males fighting for predominance.

Ironically, a more important initiative to Americanize libretti came from Europe, via Giacomo Puccini. Already *Madama Butterfly* (1904), based on a play by David Belasco, had staged American imperialism as a background for character analysis. More topical still was *La Fanciulla del West* (1910). Drawing on the frontier pattern, it depicts the joyless life during the Californian gold fever of 1849/50, including shoot-outs and near-lynchings. Based on another Belasco play, it "transformed . . . a story of individuals in the real West into a kind of morality play set in a mythical arena where everything is outsized."⁵ Whereas in *Madama Butterfly* the destruction of Cho-sho-san, the honest victim of treacherous Lieutenant Linkerton, defines the very structure of the opera, in *Fanciulla* Puccini deviates from this pattern. The plot is dense with violent acts, but these rather define characters and setting than determine the plot: "Bandit" Dick Johnson is less brutal than his rival the Sheriff, and consequently wins the title heroine Minnie's love. Violence is acknowledged as a fact of (frontier) life, unavoidable, omnipresent, yet something one has to, and can, cope with.⁶

Puccini's suggestion for Americanizing opera through a differing use of the violence theme did not take hold for two decades. Although institutions like the Metropolitan Opera held contests for operas written by Americans, the European standard repertoire was predominant. If the Twenties did not go completely without American works, it was through operas like Deems Taylor's highly derivative *The King's Henchmen* (1927), based on a nostalgic story by Edna Millay.

II

The field in which the contemporary musical theater was thriving was that of very light opera, the format which was to develop into the "musical." It is a conflux of various forms of the nineteenth century: The ballad opera, which had been prominent from colonial days onwards (such as Gay and Pepusch's *Beggar's Opera*, of 1728, or Balfe's *The Bohemian Girl*, of 1843); the musical extravaganza, which worked old and new popular forms of entertainment into plots made up to serve their respective stars; and the Gilbert and Sullivan operettas with sometimes sophisticated, satirical plots and highly complex songs, but pragmatic enough not to render speech in recitativo.

What constitutes an interesting link between these old formats and the emerging *American* opera is Kern and Hammerstein's "musical show" *Show Boat* (1927),⁷ based on a novel by Edna Ferber. Even though it certainly does not come close to the opera format, unlike old-time operetta or vaudeville it "integrated score and dramatic truth"⁸ and was performed by the New York City Opera. In a serious way it deals with racism as a structural pattern of American life. As a Broadway production it was innovative through integrating blacks and whites on one stage. The story is that of impresario Captain Hawks' family between the 1880s and the immediate present of 1927, including the love affair and marriage of Hawks' daughter Magnolia and Ravenal. The latter turns out to be a killer on the run, who will leave his wife and young daughter after losing all their money.

The whites' happy life of the first act and their disillusionment of the second act are segregated from the sphere of the blacks whose laboring keeps the "sweet, improbable and unreal world" (176) on board going:

Coloured folks work while de white men play
Loadin' up boats wid de bales of cotton,
Gittin' no rest till de judgment day. (12-13)

This collective statement of a "coloured chorus" is intensified in Joe's famous "Ol' Man River" aria. It contrasts the natural slowness and timeless disinterestedness of the river with the lives and desires of men slaving away their lives.

Dere's an ol' man called de Mississippi,
 Dat's de ol' man dat I'd like to be;
 What does he care if de world's got troubles?
 What does he care if de land ain't free?

...
 You an' me we sweat an' strain,
 Body all achin' an' racked wid pain.
 "Tote dat barge!" "Lift dat bale!"
 Git a little drunk an' you'll land in jail.
 Ah gits weary an' sick of tryin';
 Ah'm tired of livin' an' scared of dyin',
 But ol' man River,
 He jes' keeps rollin' alon'.

...
 Let me go 'way from de Mississippi,
 Let me go 'way from de white man boss.
 Show me dat stream called de River Jordan
 Dat's de ol' stream dat I long to cross. (53-58)

To blacks violence is a permanent physical condition, to whites it is – quite like the violence of *La Fanciulla del West* – a matter of common if minor relevance.

Like Ravenal, Joe is not one to cross racial lines, unlike Julie, an actress of mixed parentage happily married to Caucasian Stephen, but as the South forbids mixed marriages they are guilty of miscegenation. One drop of blood makes a Negro a Negro! When the sheriff intervenes, Stephen reacts in a curiously aggressive act of self-defense: He cuts his wife's hand with a knife and drinks her blood to become a "Negro" himself. The trick does not work, though, and Julie is imprisoned and ends up a hopeless alcoholic in Chicago.

After some forty years of turmoil Magnolia and Ravenal are reunited. But their recurrent love motif (nos. 2, 16, 20) is outbalanced by the "Ol' Man River"-theme from the introduction through the aria (no. 3), its reprise in the second act (no. 26), and the finale. Cruel acts may be typical of the white sphere, from Ravenal's having shot someone to Hawks' admission that as a young man he had killed, too, and yet their violence seems to be acceptable, as the whites in the musical are given a happy ending. Structural violence only concerns the blacks, a situation they perceive as natural and eternal.⁹

III

If the 1920s were an era of decline in American opera,¹⁰ the 1930s saw newly emerging creativity in the field. Among the factors responsible were a new consciousness of native values after the Crash of 1929, New Deal patronage for the arts, and the new audiences reached by media such as the radio and the record. Again European influences played a role:

Ernst Krenek's *Jonny spielt auf*, performed at the Met in 1929, struck an American chord through its jazz-inspired music and its title character, an African-American entertainer. It hinted at violence, when Jonny steals a violin and fights a policeman, and when a European composer tries to commit suicide – acts which symbolize Europe's morbidity and the Americans' renewal of music. And when Alban Berg's *Wozzek* came to the USA in 1931, it staged the terrors of a system which physically, psychologically, and socially produces extreme cruelty under the cover of rationalistic science. Its intensity made American composers see the potential of rendering devastating circumstances as possible operatic material.

Like Berg's, most of the early attempts at American music drama had been adaptations from literature – from Bristow's *Rip Van Winkle* of the mid-1800s through Damrosch's *The Scarlet Letter to Show Boat* –, and this still applied for the three operas in which operatic independence was finally achieved in the 1930s. All were based on texts from the 1920s: Virgil Thomson's *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1934) renders a Gertrude Stein libretto of 1927; George Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* (1935) adapts DuBose Heyward's novel and consecutive play of 1926/27; and Louis Gruenberg's *The Emperor Jones* (1933) is the musical version of Eugene O'Neill's 1921 drama. Unlike in *Four Saints*, which does not concretely refer to American realities,¹¹ in the latter two violence is of utter importance.

The Emperor Jones was commissioned by the Met but failed. Gruenberg had begun to write in an "American style" in the 1920s,¹² and he incorporated in the score folk materials without becoming folksy. The drama had shown Jones, a greedy former Pullman porter and escaped convict turned cruel emperor of a Caribbean island, chased down by his subjects. Tom-toms reflect Jones' increasing fear, beginning at the rhythm of his heartbeat to ever speed up until his death. Hallucinatory flashbacks envision his past as a murderer and as a slave

sold on the auction-block. In the end he is slain after having wasted the silver bullet that according to common superstition should have saved him.

Gruenberg's libretto made three alterations.¹³ For musical reasons Gruenberg began to use the tom-tom idea only by the end of act one. More importantly, he decided to make the pursuers' chorus rather than Jones' conscience his greatest tormentor. To an ostinato accompaniment it demands revenge in the introduction and intermission, and in the second act it is Jones' sole opponent. When Jones, in a third major change, retains a silver bullet to kill himself, Gruenberg turns him from *passive* victim into one who *actively* commits suicide. Thus in the opera Jones deserves at least some compassion. The violence he has afflicted and the violence he was exposed to comment on each other.

Even more relevant than *The Emperor Jones* is Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* (1935). Gershwin had tried opera in the Twenties, e.g. in *Blue Monday*, of 1922, which deals with a killing by accident.¹⁴ But it is *Porgy and Bess* which is suffused with violence throughout. The black community at Catfish Row is riven between extremes: morning and evening, happiness and mourning, love and death. Gershwin never brings together the main characters of the drama, Bess, Porgy, and Crown, in a way Verdi would have done.¹⁵ Individual scenes are set against each other sequentially and their "episodic music reflects the varied nature of the stage action."¹⁶

Naturalistically set in the near past, the community is isolated and ignorant, and prone to superstitions and foolery (the selling of divorces; Sporting Life's various tricks; Porgy's fear of Crown's corpse). It is also ridden by ethnic oppression (the behavior of the white detectives; the ongoing presence of former slaveholding families), and by drugs and alcohol. Nature is repeatedly featured with ominous storms and a killing sea. Poverty forces the men to go fishing under all weather conditions, and Porgy half-comprehendingly celebrates the union of material and spiritual hardship in his "I got plenty o' nottin'."

What softens the impression of despair is that the inhabitants are symbolically co-operating through the most popular song of the opera. Clara sings "Summertime" as a lullaby at the beginning, and the baby is again soothed by the tune when the storm which will kill its parents gathers. Bess takes up the song, and later Serena, whose husband had been killed by Crown, becomes the baby's next surrogate mother.

Caring for a new generation, Catfish Row will survive the disasters which constitute the opera.

Crown dominates the community – if necessary by killing, like in the opening scene, in which he stabs Robbins with a fishhook. He holds Bess dependent with the help of Sporting Life's "happy dust," through alcohol, and rape. She cannot withdraw from his and Sporting Life's powers even after having found temporary shelter with Porgy, the only character strong enough to oppose Crown. And Porgy, seemingly a loser for his naiveté and physical disability, and thus an emotional anchor for the spectator's sympathy, is hardly as naive as others think he is.

Much like in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* homicide opens the plot, and Crown's subsequent flight to Kittiwah Island makes possible Bess and Porgy's struggling for their love. He is a victim of circumstances, though. Teased for being drunk and too slow to follow the crap-game, he kills unthinkingly, and any of the gamblers could have been his target.¹⁷ It is Porgy's assassinating Crown which is outright murder, if with an element of self-defense. As early as in act II he plans to destroy his rival ("An' remember, when Crown come, that's my business, Bess!" [79]),¹⁸ and when Crown comes back to Catfish Row to collect her in act III, Porgy acts in cold blood:

Crown enters the empty courtyard and picks his way stealthily across the court. Dropping to his hands and knees he crawls toward Porgy's door. Above Crown, the shutter opens slowly. An arm is extended, the hand grasping a long knife. The arm descends plunging the knife into Crown's back. The knife is withdrawn and hurled into court. Crown staggers upright as Porgy leans from the window and closes both hands around his throat. They struggle at the window, and Porgy kills Crown, hurling the body into the courtyard. (85)

There is nothing accidental about this, and Porgy "laughingly, triumphantly" states "Bess, Bess, you got a man now, you got Porgy." But Bess is gone. Sporting Life has lured her into leaving with him. Porgy has freed the community of an oppressor, but – back in excessive naiveté – he sets out to go to New York in his goat-cart.

Much of the violence in the opera is gendered. Bess is clearly a victim, as are Serena and Clara. But the women do not give in easily, especially when it comes to Sporting Life, who at least physically is less dangerous than Crown. Maria even "*Grabs Sporting Life by the throat and picks up [a] carving knife*" (66) and threatens him in a sadistic aria:

Somebody got to carve you up to set these peoples free
 An' de writin' on the wall says it's goin' to be me
 Some night when you is full of gin an' don't know I's about
 I'm goin' to take you by de tail and turn you inside out.
 Frien's wid you, low-life, hell, no!
 Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! I's figgerin' to break yo' bones.
 Yes, sir, one by one.
 An' then I'm goin' to carve you up an' hang you in de sun.
 I'll feed yo' meat to buzzards an' give 'em belly aches.
 An' take yo' bones to Kittiwah to pizen rattlesnakes. (66)

Through acts like *Porgy's* and songs like *Maria's*, Gershwin breaks up distinctions between good and bad violence. No previous opera had gone so far in acknowledging physical brutality as a major trait of American life.

IV

During the Forties American opera would daringly break down conventions. Immigrant composers now could blend into established American traditions. The American opera in which violence probably is most prominent is Kurt Weill's *Street Scene* (1947). Operatically its "urban verismo"¹⁹ is a transposition to modern America of the veristic opera of late 19th-century Italy, in which Puccini had played a role. Based on Elmer Rice's play and with a libretto by Rice and Langston Hughes, it depicts a suffocatingly hot and humid day and night in a working-class street in contemporary New York. A wide range of characters from various backgrounds are marked through linguistic and musical means. Old-time operatic arias are set against Broadway-type tunes and passages of spoken text. The relatively isolated "numbers" in the opera reflect the isolation of its characters and the social fragmentation of the neighborhood.

None of the large number of interwoven stories is without some form of violence. The plot opens early in the morning by immigrant women gossiping and exerting tight social control over what happens in their street. They talk about an affair Mrs. Maurrant has with one Steve Sankey. Cries are heard from a room in which a woman is going through the labors of childbirth, and children are fighting – among them Mrs. Maurrant's son, who has to defend his "whore" mother. Into this

little universe enters the outside world, when Rose Maurrant is torn between Sam Kaplan, a poor if promising young man from the neighborhood, and her boss, who tempts her to try a career on Broadway; for a kiss or two he would help her. Sam is beaten up by a boy who has sexually attacked Rose. Sam's and Rose's fathers argue about politics: Abraham Kaplan, a Jewish immigrant, tries to convince everybody that the "kepitalist press" distorts reality and that a revolution is pending. Chauvinistic Irishman Frank Maurrant's answer is to threaten him physically:

- | | |
|----------|---|
| Kaplan | All dis is bourgeois propaganda to take the minds of de verkers from de kless struggle. |
| Maurrant | All right, we heard enough. You better lay off that Red talk, or you're liable to get your head busted open. (62) ²⁰ |

When the child is born, it is the ominous Mrs. Maurrant who helps to deliver it, but she is rudely accused by her husband that she does not keep order among her own household and children. He leaves for an overnight work date, and Mrs. Maurrant is indeed visited by Sankey. But Maurrant comes back, finds them, and shoots both his wife and her lover; a common fact of life, the killing scene is not even set to music. Soon people, aroused by the press, come to view the location, like the two nursemaids wheeling baby carriages and singing a cruel lullaby:

- | | |
|---------|---|
| First: | Hush, baby hush,
Your daddy is a lush.
Shut your eyelids tight. |
| Second: | He's plastered every night. |
| First: | No, darling, no.
Your mammy has a beau.
Snooze, little man. |
| Second: | She cheats whenever she can,
Your parents are a loving pair; |
| First: | He smacks her face; |
| Second: | She pulls his hair; |
| First: | Their shrieks and curses fill the air. (109) |

Maurrant flees but is shot by the police and arrested. To Rose he confesses his love for his dead wife and acknowledges that he will be

sentenced to death on the electric chair. Losing both her parents that way, Rose follows the lure of Broadway into an insecure future.

The opera ends when the next morning dawns, with another scene of women gossiping and complaining about the weather. An apartment cleared by the sheriff (because the inhabitants could not pay the rent) has been leased again, and even for the Murrants' flat there is a couple waiting to move in immediately. This cyclic frame implies that none of the events is in any way unique.

Although most of the action is in some way connected with the Murrant family, the wide range of violent situations – from losing one's living quarters to murder – is a product of complex conditions, ranging from the weather through public prejudices and jealousy to the dream of a better collective or individual life. Explicitly, Weill subtitled his music drama an "American Opera," and violence in it is omnipresent.

The composer's *Down in the Valley* (1948) followed immediately after *Street Scene*, but marked a political change and a return to a more conventional format. Now that opera had become Americanized, a search began for a new operatic audience. Calling *Porgy and Bess* a "folk opera" had been misleading, as it was not based on pre-existing materials; now a type of folk opera was becoming fashionable which brought together easily recognizable material for the benefit and education of a greater public. *Down in the Valley's* story and music were apt for school performances. Unlike in *Porgy and Bess* or *Street Scene* good and bad came to be easily separated again: The basic action is that a young man is waiting to be hanged at the gallows for slaying an older man who had indecently attacked his bride. He breaks out of jail to see her again, and then calmly waits to be arrested again and executed. In a series of flashbacks it becomes clear that he goes to his hanging knowing that his was a righteous cause.

Into the context of folk opera also fit Howard Hanson's *Merry Mount* (1934), based on a Hawthorne story, and Douglas Moore's *The Devil and Daniel Webster* (1939), an adaptation of a short story Stephen Vincent Benét had published in 1936. It is a tall-tale about the despair of a poor man of New Hampshire who, on a contract with the devil, gains wealth. When he realizes his impending death, he names Webster his legal aid. In front of a court made up of infamous historical Americans (among them Judge Hathorne), Webster wins an acquittal and drives the devil out to Massachusetts, where – ironically – he will be more

welcome. Much of the opera is prose dialogue, and its music mainly emphasizes emotion – tension, hopelessness, and (in a weird fiddle scene) lack of restraint. As the main character escapes from the pact with evil, the violence inherent in the opera is even more unobtrusive than in *Down in the Valley*.

A different kind of foreshadowing of the conservatism of the Fifties came through William Grant Still. His first attempts at opera were made in the 1920s, but it was only in the late Forties that his dream of an African-American opera came true in *Troubled Island* (1949). Still immediately saw its lack of success as the result of a communist conspiracy, even though Langston Hughes had been his librettist.²¹

The main character is Jean-Jacques Dessalines, emperor of Haiti, who was murdered in 1806.²² The basic idea is not unlike that of *The Emperor Jones*, but Still's musical material is less innovative than Gruenberg's, and the plot is more conventionally organized than O'Neill's. Dessalines is not only an incapable ruler, he has also cruelly left his wife. Act I shows him before the Revolution, acts II and III depict his lack of leadership as an emperor, and in act IV he is murdered and mourned by his abandoned wife. In a revised ending,²³ Still left him fatally wounded, so that the couple can confess their mutual love before he dies. Even more than in the earlier version, this is a return to the longish dying scenes of European opera in which love overcomes death.²⁴ Although the opera addresses the question of black leadership, the remote time of action and the highly conventional plot prevent it from being a relevant contribution to contemporary problems.

Street Scene analyzed the omnipresence of violence in the American cities, and the folk operas tried to reunite ideological and musical populism by focusing on rural myths. But time was also ripe for a psychological analysis of how violence works. It was Marc Blitzstein's *Regina* (1949),²⁵ a musical version of Lillian Hellman's *The Little Foxes* (1939), which interpreted this traditional operatic theme on the basis of a clearly American subject and musical language. Against the background of the dying culture and economy of the South at the turn of the twentieth century Regina Giddens plans to kill her husband Horace in order to get control of the family assets and modernize the cotton mills to fit with the new industrial order. In a scene dense with terror she refuses to give up her needs. Her husband collapses and dies on-stage, leaving her alone with her neighbors but also her daughter

Alexandra desert Regina. Her attempt at "modernization" fails, but she will fight on.

V

By the end of the Forties American opera had not only developed a tradition of its own, in works like Still's there were signs that old patterns would be revived. The vast range of subjects that was at the composer's hand is to be exemplified in four interactive fields: Opera in 1) an explicitly political context; 2) as an educational medium grounded in popular traditions; 3) in references to historic events; and 4) in creative uses of literary texts.

1) Gian Carlo Menotti's *The Consul* (1950) reacted to the refusal of the American government to help World War II refugees. At the consulate Magda Sorel seeks to get visa for herself, her ailing child, and her husband John, a revolutionary sought by the secret police. A secretary cynically frustrates any attempt at contacts with the Consul and instead, in a Kafkaesque way, hands out innumerable forms. John is badly injured and eventually arrested, the child dies, and Magda gasses herself in the kitchen stove – not before finding out that the Consul and the secret police are co-operating. In the dying scene she envisions many a refugee to have shared her fate.

If *The Consul* was a moralistic outcry, Earl Robinson's *Sandhog* (1954),²⁶ based on Theodore Dreiser's "St. Columba and the River" (1927), analyzed the working conditions of the laborers ("sandhogs") who built Hoboken Bridge. By inserting spoken text and using a narrator and a workers' chorus it refers back to propaganda shows like Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock* (1937). Due to poor safety regulations fatal accidents happen. When the bridge is opened, the dead "sandhogs" are passed over, but the narrator's final vision compares the building of the bridge with the building of a new society.

2) Political opera was occasionally combined with folk opera, as in Aaron Copland's *The Tender Land* (1955), which, using the setting of an isolated family farm in the Midwest, deals with xenophobia yet does not explicitly mention violent acts. More relevant here is Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah* (1955). A biblical story is transferred into revival-ridden rural Tennessee, including references to Southern music. The community has excluded nineteen-year old Susannah, an orphan living

with her brother Sam, from their village because her beauty arouses the male inhabitants. When one day the elders, looking for a place for a baptism, come upon her taking a bath in a creek naked, they accuse her of threatening public morals; young Little Bat is even forced by his parents to lie that she has seduced him. Although the new preacher Blitch stages a meeting at the church for everyone to confess their sins in public (and the physical terror of the meeting is doubled by the intensity of images of sinners burning in the eternal fire of hell), Susannah refuses. The mood in the village is so menacing that Sam hands her a gun. Blitch, as lonely as Susannah, spends the night with her. Unable to concede his own sin, he at least wants to dispel the villagers' accusations against her. Susannah cannot forgive his bigotry, and Sam kills him. Sam flees, and Susannah symbolically slaps Little Bat in the face, making clear that she has withdrawn even from her few former friends. She decides to stay in defiance of all the hostility around her.

The basic story line – Sam shooting the preacher in revenge for seducing Susannah – is well-known in European opera. Yet the setting and conditions are completely American, as is the subject of a self-righteous majority versus deviant if morally innocent individuals. Susannah has grown in the process: Now an active fighter for her rights, she is no longer a mere victim but can act self-confidently and resist public opinion.

3) The historical format was chosen by Douglas Moore. But his *The Ballad of Baby Doe* (1958) has nothing of the playfulness of folk opera. Covering nineteen years, it also displays physical aging. The opera was conceived from the real case of Baby Doe, a former senator's widow who – incarnation of moral goodness – froze to death at a disused mine after her husband's death to rejoin him in a better life. Their love is preceded by unhappy marriages, and the senator's former wife arrogantly pursues them throughout the opera. In the final scene the dying ex-senator visualizes the decades Baby Doe will wait for their reunion. The plot opens on the frontier (like in Puccini a saloon, with gun shots and miners fighting), moves through the deceitful political scene of Washington D.C., to end back at the now impoverished mining camp. Violence is, apart from hatred and social prejudice, present mainly in the vicious "dog-eat-dog" economic and political mechanisms in the U.S.A.²⁷

4) Leonard Bernstein's *West Side Story* is another strand of the literature-based musicals which had begun with *How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying* and *How to Succeed in Love Without Really Trying*. It goes further in linking opera and musicals, not only through its tighter structure, but also in staging the love story which is underlying the murderous scene he and librettist Arthur Laurents (himself an excellent composer) condensed from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* into the New York setting of the Fifties.

The historic and the literary merge in Robert Ward's *The Crucible* (1961),²⁸ based on Arthur Miller's play. Although Ward follows the drama quite literally, including the executions of John Putnam, Rebecca Nurse, and the pressing-to-death of Giles Corey, violence takes place off-stage, so that it is mainly its effects which are in focus. Ward reinterprets the Salem witch-hunts as not so much a political reminder of the dangers of intolerance, which Miller had in mind, but as a scene in the eternal battle of the sexes. Ward restores the traditional opera format, explicitly taking Verdi as one of his influences, yet uses a wide range of musical styles from medieval allusions to popular types of music of the present.

Ward, whose musical influences include church singing and jazz, used the European pattern quite purposefully, and Bernstein, who was most eminent as a conductor of nineteenth-century European works, saw no problem in composing in a format many an operatic purist would never find acceptable. In many ways American opera had come full circle, and in the process most conventions of the oeuvre were first exploded and then reintroduced in altered ways. A different use of violence was of crucial importance as one factor in the process. The drawback was, though, that this fixation on American experiences restricted its international impact, and thus produced a new sort of American provincialism. From the 1960s onwards a post-nationalistic trend emerged in the musical dramas of Stephen Sondheim, the video operas of Steve Reich, or the highly stylized operatic works of Philip Glass and John Adams. Violence did play a role, but was less typically American. Yet this story is to be told elsewhere.

Notes

¹ For a concise survey see Gilbert Chase, *America's Music From the Pilgrims to the Present*, rev. 3rd ed. (Urbana/Chicago: U of Illinois P, 1987) 542-61; the full story is told in John Dizikes, *Opera in America: A Cultural History* (New Haven/London: Yale UP, 1993).

² See Ronald L. Davis, *A History of Music in American Life*, 3 vols. (Huntington, NY: Robert Krieger Publ. Co., 1981), vol. 1: 240-288.

³ Summarized in Davis, vol. 2: 60.

⁴ Klaus-Dieter Gross, "The Politics of Scott Joplin's *Treemonisha*," *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 45.3 (2000): 387-404.

⁵ George Martin, *The Opera Companion to Twentieth-Century Opera* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1979) 150.

⁶ For details on works and composers discussed see Stanley Sadie, ed., *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*, 4 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1992), H. Wiley Hitchcock and Stanley Sadie, eds., *The New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, 4 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1980), and The Earl of Harewood and Anthony Peattie, eds., *The New Kobbé's Opera Book*, 11th ed. (London: Ebury Press, 1997). Exemplary German language sources are Rudolf Kloiber und Wulf Konold, *Handbuch der Oper* (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1993), and Carl Dahlhaus et al., eds., *Pipers Enzyklopädie des Musiktheaters. Werke*, 6 vols. (München/Zürich: Piper, 1987).

⁷ Quoted in Jerome Kern/Oscar Hammerstein II, *Show Boat: A Musical Play* (London: Chappell & Co, [n.d.]).

⁸ Davis, vol. 3: 252.

⁹ In the novel the negative image of the river extends into the white world. It kills the Captain (who, in the musical, stays alive and well to the end), and, in Magnolia's perspective, although the river is her "home," it is "ruthless, relentless, Gargantuan, terrible. One might think to know its currents and channels ever so well, but once caught unprepared in the maelstrom, one would be sucked down and devoured as Captain Andy Hawks had been in that other turbid hungry flood" (Edna Ferber, *Show Boat* [1926; Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Crest, 1971] 157). The suffering of blacks is almost absent, and Jo (the "Joe" of the musical) is a musically-minded cook rather than a toiling workhand.

¹⁰ Dizikes 413 and 464; consequently, although New York was the hub for opera imported from Europe, American works are practically absent even from detailed analyses like Carol J. Oja's *Making Music Modern: New York in the 1920s* (Oxford/New York: OUP, 2000).

¹¹ Cf. Klaus-Dieter Gross, "How Much of America Is There in It? The Stein/Thomson Operas," *Transatlantic Modernism*, ed. Martin Klepper and Joseph C. Schöpp (Heidelberg: Winter, 2000) 277-300.

¹² See Robert Franklin Nisbett, "Louis Gruenberg: His Life and Works" (diss., Ohio State U, 1979; rpt. Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms International, 1979) 86-93.

¹³ Nisbett 224-227.

¹⁴ Summarized in Heinz Wagner, *Das große Handbuch der Oper*, 2nd ed. (Wilhelmshaven: Florian Nötzel Verlag, 1991) 234.

¹⁵ Cf. Martin 391.

¹⁶ Kobbé 244.

- ¹⁷ This is why some summaries skip the killing of Robbins; see, e.g., Wagner 234-235.
- ¹⁸ Quoted from the booklet to George Gershwin, *Porgy and Bess* (Decca 414559-2) 50-92.
- ¹⁹ Dizikes 506.
- ²⁰ Quoted from the booklet to Kurt Weill, *Street Scene: An American Opera* (Decca 433371-2).
- ²¹ See Catherine Parsons Smith, *William Grant Smith: A Study in Contradictions* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2000) 182-212.
- ²² No recording is available, but the opera is discussed in some detail in Smith 187-192.
- ²³ Cf. Smith 191-192.
- ²⁴ See, e.g., Massenet's *Werther*.
- ²⁵ Astrid Schmitt-v. Mühlenfels, *Amerikanische Literatur in amerikanischen Literaturoperen: Fünf Beispiele zum Gattungswechsel* (Essen: Die Blaue Eule, 1999) 11-19; Klaus-Dieter Gross, "Moralische Dekadenz oder eine Chance für das Leben? Marc Blitzsteins Opernversion von Lillian Hellmans *The Little Foxes*," *Geburt und Tod im Kunstvergleich*, ed. Gudrun Grabher (Trier: WTV Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1995) 167-186.
- ²⁶ Cf. Peter Czerny, *Opernbuch* (Berlin: Henschelverlag, 1982) 371-373.
- ²⁷ Even further from the American present is Nicolas Nabokov's *The Holy Devil* (1958), which is set in Tsarist Russia and describes the psychological complexities around plans to murder Rasputin. Nabokov's choice of subject may have been topical, as he was a front man in the clandestine if state-run anti-communist cultural activities of the Fifties; cf. Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta Books, 1999).
- ²⁸ See Klaus-Dieter Gross, "The *Crucible* as Drama and as Opera," *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 1 (2001) 44-58; Schmitt-v. Mühlenfels 21-30.

Tod Browning's *Freaks* and the Fraternity of the Fragmented¹

Bernd Herzogenrath

Tod Browning's 1932 movie *Freaks* has been a cat-o'-nine-lives. From its original conception as a horror movie exceeding all expectations, something more disturbing than anything seen so far, via Dwain Esper's exploitation of it under dubious and misleading titles such as *Forbidden Love*, *Monster Show* and *Nature's Mistakes*, to its revival as an avant-garde movie in the tradition of Buñuel and Robbe-Grillet, *Freaks* has covered the range of horror, art-house and documentary. While *Freaks* on the whole has remained a somehow underappreciated and undertheorized movie, those essays that deal with it read it in the context of disability and gender studies.² Though there definitely are points of convergence, I will try a somewhat different approach here, relating *Freaks* to psychoanalytical theory, especially a 'blend' of Freudian and Lacanian concepts, since the movie's associations with grotesque spectacle situate it in the Freudian realm of the fantastic and that of Lacan's mirror stage.

Film and psychoanalysis – from their respective beginnings – have sported a relationship which can be defined as both elective affinity and dangerous liaison. The movies as a popular medium as well as psychoanalysis as a 'popular science' (at least in its 'vulgar' form) both saw a rise to prominence in the first half of the last century. After all, both of them deal with people's dreams and fantasies. Thus, aspects of the dreamwork such as displacement and condensation, free associations, oedipal situations and traumatic constellations became important elements for both narrative structures and imagery of the cinema. On the other hand, films made (and more often than not distorted) psychoanalytic terminology into everyday household concepts. Freud himself was very skeptical about the ability of cinema to deal effectively with the subject. He was so famous in 'Dream Factory circles' that Samuel Goldwyn in 1924 planned sailing to Vienna on a mission to produce the greatest love story from the world's most famous doctor of love, an attempt to get Sigmund Freud to write a

screenplay for a love story about Anthony and Cleopatra. Although the offer was more than generous – \$ 100,000 – Freud kindly declined.³

In one of his essays, Montaigne had stated that dreams are “faithful interpreters of our inclinations; but there is an art sorting and understanding them.”⁴ *Freaks*, I argue, is such a sorter of the dreamwork, attempting to provide an understanding of our inclinations or self-images, an understanding that may not always be easy or pleasing. As Louella Parsons, Hollywood gossip columnist, stated after seeing *Freaks* – “I came into the Criterion Theater from the gayety of Mrs. Gardner Sullivan’s luncheon party and I felt as if I had suddenly fallen asleep and were having a weird nightmare . . .”⁵

With a significant number of his movies set in the world of the circus and the sideshow, Browning very well knew the milieu he was talking about. Born in Louisville, Kentucky, in 1880, as Charles Albert Browning, he soon ran away from home and entered the world of the circus, christening himself in Gatsby-like fashion as “Tod” Browning. True to the implications of his new identity (“Tod” is also the German word for “death”), Browning performed as “The Living Hypnotic Corpse,” being buried alive in a box with a secret ventilating system. People paid for watching ‘un-dead’ Tod in his coffin through a tube. Entering movie business in 1913 as an actor in *Scenting a Terrible Crime* (he played an undertaker there), he soon worked as an assistant director for D.W. Griffith’s *Intolerance* (where he even had a small role) before he started as a director in his own right.

By 1919, after profitable movies such as *Jim Bludso*, Browning was an established and successful director and script writer. This was also the year he started collaborating with Lon Chaney, the “Man With the Thousand Faces.” With Chaney, Browning made a series of very successful movies focussing on the themes of obsessive revenge and sexually charged mutilations of the body. Chaney, with his genius for startling make-up (usually of his own invention) and performances that made use of his physique as a tool to be contorted and deformed into almost every (in)conceivable pose, “gave body to the macabre figments of Browning’s carnival background.”⁶ Together with his capability of completely changing his outward appearance, Chaney was able to equip his characters with an extreme emotional intensity when it came to the depiction of suffering – mainly due to his almost masochistic will to perfection. Joan Crawford, co-star in *The Unknown*, recalled Chaney sitting in a tight leather harness during hour-long breaks in the

production. Browning would ask him "‘Lon, don't you want me to untie your arms?' And Lon would answer, 'No, the pain I am enduring now will help the scene. Let's go!'"⁷ That Browning's and Chaney's interest in bodily mutilations as a leitmotif served as an important working principle (and also as an already established leitmotif eagerly expected by the audience) is revealed in an interview given by a tongue-in-cheek Browning: "When we're getting ready to discuss a new story [Chaney] would amble into my office and say 'Well, what's it going to be, boss?' I'll say, 'This time a leg comes off, or an arm, or a nose' – whatever it may be."⁸

In 1931, MGM production head Irving Thalberg commissioned script writer Willis Goldbeck to come up with a story to out-horror even Browning's own *Dracula* and upcoming projects such as Universal's *Frankenstein* and Paramount's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde: Freaks*, based on Clarence Robbins' story "Spurs."

Freaks starts with a carnival barker who is displaying a sideshow freak. Realism is introduced by the barker tearing apart the opening film title from within the diegetic space, thus attempting to fuse extradiegetic reality with the narrated universe, peopled by 'real freaks' – when casting the movie, Browning had the largest conglomeration of professional freaks applying for a role. The use of 'real freaks' somehow denied actors and audience the safe assurance that what was shown onscreen was 'just a fiction.' The 'life on screen' has always had the tendency to seem 'more real' than reality itself, but with the sole strategies taken away that would still leave open the possibility of differentiation – the make-up tricks and special effects – the already fragile distinction seemed to collapse completely. It was as if the audience were back in the times of Louis Lumière, trying to escape the train arriving at the station (or the freak, for that matter) and invading the 'safe' space of reality and the self – the audiences screaming and leaving the theatres at screenings of *Freaks* is a case in point.

The barker addresses the spectators, "Friends, she was once a beautiful woman . . ."⁹ After the audience catches sight of the freak, some women scream, and the barker tells her story. Cleopatra (Olga Baclanova), a beautiful trapeze artist with the carnival, is adored by a midget named Hans (Harry Earles). Frieda (Daisy Earles), his fiancée (also a midget), warns Hans that Cleopatra is only interested in him because he gives her money and expensive presents. Cleopatra has an affair with Hercules (Henry Victor), the circus' Strong Man, and when

Frieda confronts her to stop making a fool of Hans, she mistakenly reveals to Cleopatra that Hans has inherited a fortune. Cleopatra and Hercules plan to get the money by having Cleopatra married to Hans and then poisoning him. During the wedding reception, while Cleopatra is openly flirting with Hercules, the freaks all gather around the table and begin a ritual of accepting Cleopatra to their circle. When a dwarf passes around a large loving cup for a communal toast, he is rebuffed by Cleopatra. She seals her fate by recoiling in disgust, pouring the champagne over the dwarf's head, mocking their acceptance ceremony, calling them "Dirty, slimy Freaks!" and ordering them to leave. Back in Cleopatra's carnival wagon, she poisons Hans' drink, but Venus (Leila Hyams), one of the sympathizing 'big people,' confronts her former lover, Hercules, and threatens him unless he tells the doctor who is treating Hans about the poison. With the medicine the doctor gives, Cleopatra attempts to poison Hans again as she gives him his dosage, but this time she is surrounded by all the freaks banding together and attacking her. Meanwhile, in the heavy rain, Hercules goes after Venus, who is pulling her carnival wagon out to escape from his fury when Phroso, the clown (Wallace Ford), comes to her rescue. He can't handle Hercules by himself, so the freaks throw a knife at Hercules. Reportedly, in the original version of the film, he was castrated by the freaks – however, that scene was cut from the film. After that, we are back to the sideshow barker again. This scene thus functions like a kind of frame. In the beginning, we left the audience after they have seen the "most amazing, the most astounding living monstrosity of all time." The film audience is denied the gaze at the 'living monstrosity' up to this very moment. Now we see the result of the freaks' revenge on Cleopatra. She has been turned into a legless, half-blind stump, a squawking chicken woman. A final scene, which was indeed tacked on later, as the studio insisted on a happy ending, shows Hans living like a millionaire in an elegant house, and Phroso and Venus bring along Daisy and the two lovers reconcile.

A constant throughout his work, sexually charged mutilations play a dominant role in Browning's movies. This points to the fact that the body 'as such' is already libidinally charged. In the body, as a kind of 'primary fact of existence,' the human subject encounters itself as both subject and object. As Freud has shown, the agency and formation of the ego reveal a close complicity with the notion of the body. For Freud, the "ego is first and foremost a bodily ego . . . the projection of a

surface."¹⁰ In fact, Freud argues that it is only through this investment that the body becomes accessible to us at all: "The ego is ultimately derived from bodily sensations" (*The Ego and the Id* 364, n.2), a point where body and the social collide, and which gains the utmost importance by being the first 'object' to which the human being's libidinal resources are attached. This peculiar status of the human being as *speaking* being also turns the body into *metaphor as such*. Since the speaking human subject *qua* signifier is always already inscribed in the symbolic, the body is always more than just a biological given or natural fact.

Jacques Lacan develops Freud's notion of the ego being a 'bodily projection,' connects the question of identity to the relation of the human being to its body (image) and shows that the image of wholeness is an illusion attempting to cover a basic lack. In his essay on the "mirror stage,"¹¹ Lacan reveals the ego to be not a pre-reflexive entity, a stable core of the self which gradually evolves. In fact, the ego itself is already based on reflection. Constructed within visual space, the ego is the result of various identificatory processes, of the constant oscillation between 'self' and 'other:' there is no chance of perceiving one's own identity as separate from what is exterior to it. The ego is not so much the source of self-knowledge but the result of a fundamental "*méconnaissance*" (*Écrits* 6). There exists what Lacan calls the effect of a physiological "*prematurity of birth*" (*Écrits* 4) characteristic of the human newborn that shows itself in its "motor incapacity and nursling dependence" (*Écrits* 2). The child experiences 'its' own body in terms of incompleteness, insufficiency and motor uncoordination. What follows is the anticipatorial identification with the image of one's own body in the mirror. The promised and illusory totality of the ego is always threatened by phantasmatic returns of images of incompleteness. Thus, the mirror stage is a "succession of phantasies that extends from a fragmented body-image to a form of its totality that I shall call orthopaedic – and, lastly, to the assumption of an alienating identity" (*Écrits* 4).

Lacan thus shows how identity is constructed, is an *effect* rather than a *cause*, and is forever situated at/as a precarious balance between the complete body and the fragmented body. Every identity is a "fictitious invention" and rests on a fundamental misconception. By "jubilatory" identifying with the imaginary mirage of the whole body, the 'real' of the fragmented body is repressed. However, this sense of unity is very frail, and the images of the fragmented body haunt and thus subvert any

illusion of wholeness – “This fragmented body . . . appears in the form of disjointed limbs – the very same that the visionary Hieronymus Bosch has fixed, for all time, in painting. . . .” (*Écrits* 5). Ultimately, for Lacan, these two body images are inseparable.

In Browning’s movies, the body – in particular its dismemberment – plays a crucial role in his understanding of ‘horror.’ It is here that Freud’s essay on ‘The Uncanny’ might present a fruitful theoretical foil against which to situate *Freaks*. Freud’s essay, I argue, in contrast to its seeming dated-ness when it comes to the modern ‘horror-genre,’ still provides a rich concept for analysis, precisely because it adds a further dimension to the oft-quoted cathartic effect of horror – the ‘return of the repressed.’ David Skal and Elias Savada have speculated in their book *Dark Carnival* that Browning himself – or via one of his scenario writers, Herman J. Mankiewicz – might have been accustomed to Freudian concepts. Mankiewicz is portrayed as being equipped with “both the cynical literary sophistication of a mid-Twenties Manhattanite and an awareness of the literary/dramatic implications of Freudian theory” (*Dark Carnival* 103). Having lived in Berlin in the 1920s, Mankiewicz was likely to “familiar with the currents of psychoanalytic thought swirling about the German capital.”¹² Be it as it may, the Oedipus-complex as a narrative structure, as well as aspects of the Freudian “Uncanny,” dominate Browning’s work.

In his essay, Freud actually refers to bodily fragmentation as providing powerful images of the “uncanny”: “dismembered limbs, a severed head, a hand cut off at the wrist”¹³ – the dismemberment is what is regarded as *unheimlich*. According to Freud, “[this] uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression” (*Uncanny* 363-4).¹⁴ The horror and repulsion associated with the sight of the freaks – the screaming audience *within* the film acts as a stand-in here – can thus be seen as a result of the repression of the primal fragmentariness of the body. What has to be stressed, then, is the relation of the uncanny to the ‘normal:’ “the *unheimlich* is what was once *heimisch*, home-like, familiar; the prefix ‘un’ [un-] is the token of repression” (*Uncanny* 368). If these findings are connected to Lacan’s view of the body-image, there is much to be found, I argue, which makes a psychoanalytical reading of *Freaks* worthwhile. Read together with Freud’s essay, what has to be stressed then is the fact that the fragmented body emerges as the

'real(ity)' of the whole body. Not its utterly other, but its 'dark self.' The narcissistic 'big people' Cleopatra and Hercules are tied to the midgets and Living Torsos as inseparable as Daisy and Violet Hilton, the Siamese Twins, are tied to each other.

In the characters of Hercules, the Strong Man, and Cleopatra, the beautiful trapeze artist, the extreme individualism of American society is revealed. From its beginning onwards, American mythology had been preoccupied with the strong, whole, autonomous body. The American movie industry followed this preoccupation with the beautiful body. As Richard Watts, Jr., in a positive review of an earlier Browning movie, *The Show*, pointed out, "Where every director, save Stroheim, breathes wholesomeness, out-of-door-freshness and the healthiness of the clean-limbed, Tod Browning revels in murkiness."¹⁵ Thus, in *Freaks* Browning also continues his subversion of 'clean-limbedness' both on the level of content and form, or visual aesthetics. In contrast to the stylish, glossy and optimistic 'gray' tones of the 'usual' MGM productions, Browning was more inspired by movies of German expressionism such as *Nosferatu* and *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, with its harsh black and white contrasts. Browning was about to bring shadow its due reception in the movies. No wonder for a director whose "psyche was an attic, a crypt, a trunk, it was terrorized by sunlight, fields, deserts, woods and open spaces. . . . Tod Browning, the agoraphobic director *par excellence*."¹⁶ On another level, the complex complicity between fragmentation and wholeness is repeated in the filmic medium itself. The 'unseen' filmic cut represses the fragmentation of its images in favor of the illusory wholeness – the 'unity' and coherence of the filmic image, its propelling forward, is in fact an effect of its inherent fragmentation. Also the 'dismemberment' of characters by use of certain shots – decapitation as a consequence of a close up, dismembered limbs in detail shots – as well as their subsequent re-membering in the mind of the audience, relating all fragments to the image of the depicted character, can be read in the same way, in a kind of identification with images of wholeness as portrayed in Lacan's mirror stage, which is indeed not just a developmental phase, but a foil underlying all subsequent identifications, and ultimately the visual realm as such. Finally, *Freaks* itself was mutilated, cut, censored because of its obvious opposition against wholeness, unity and 'clean-limbedness.'

In a scene early on in the movie, the freaks are shown playing around at a pastoral lakeside under the surveillance of Mme. Tetrallini, the benevolent matron of the circus. A passing game-keeper has seen them and, terrified, reports to the owner of the property, describing them as "a lot of horrible, twisted things, crawling, whining, globbering . . . there must be a law in France to smother such things at birth, or lock them up." Arriving on the scene, the proprietor and the game-keeper – and we, the audience – for the first time see the freaks as a group: the "pinheads" Zip, Pip, Schlitzie and the Snow Twins; the half-boy Johnny Eck, who moves forward on his hands because the lower half of his body is missing; a Skeleton Man (Pete Robinson), Angelo Rossito, the dwarf, and the "Hindu Prince Randian," the "Living Torso" – a trunk and a head, no arms, no legs. When the two men arrive, the freaks seem to be frightened and run for shelter to Mme. Tetrallini. She explains to the proprietor, "When I have a chance I like to take them into the sunshine and let them play like children. That is what most of them are – children." After the owner of the property has allowed them to stay, Mme. Tetrallini says to the freaks, "How many times have I told you not to be frightened. Have I not told you God looks after all his children?"

Yet, it is exactly mistaking the freaks as children as equal to being naive – or minor – that will prove dangerous for those who do. Constantly treating Hans like a child – and not as a man, as he insists – Cleopatra's misconception reaches its fatal climax when she and Hercules plan to poison Hans to get hold of his inheritance. Cleopatra's fate is sealed when she mistakenly thinks "Midgets . . . are not strong . . . They could get sick." Georges Bataille, in an essay on *Wuthering Heights*, has commented on the realm of childhood as posing a serious threat to the restrictions and laws of society. By equating benefit with profit, the Good with reason, Bataille can say that what is at stake is a "revolt of Evil against Good" (*Literature and Evil* 19). It is not a question of the immoral against the moral: evil is understood here as something a-moral rather than immoral (and *moral* can be taken here in the Nietzschean sense of a thinly disguised craving for profit – Cleopatra and Hector would definitely subscribe to that). With the freaks, however, things change. *Their* law, their moral code, is based on different premises – not on individualism, but on group-strength, on mutual support: "Their code is a law unto themselves. Offend one, and you offend them all."

Thus, I argue, any conventionally 'moralistic' reading of *Freaks* misses the point – although such a reading definitely has been invited by the awkward preamble of the film:

Before proceeding with the showing of this HIGHLY UNUSUAL ATTRACTION, a few words should be said about the amazing subject matter. . . . The revulsion with which we view the abnormal, the malformed and the mutilated is the result of long conditioning by our forefathers. The majority of freaks themselves are endowed with normal thoughts and emotions. Their lot is truly a heartbreaking one. . . . Never again will such a story be filmed, as modern science and teratology is rapidly eliminating such blunders of nature from the world. With humility for the many injustices done . . . we present the most startling horror story of the ABNORMAL and the UNWANTED.

However, this preamble was tacked on to the movie by exploitation mogul Dwain Esper for his re-release of *Freaks*. As a consequence of the fact that this preamble appears on copies to this day, Skal and Savada explain, "audiences and critics have assumed it is some kind of position statement of Browning himself, instead of a distributor's cynical attempt to position the picture with a moralistic, 'educational' defense – just like the pictures about sex and drugs" (*Dark Carnival* 223).

Yet, those who claim that the freaks' violence undermines every attempt of the movie to 'normalize' them – e.g., the freaks are never shown in their show acts, as spectacles, rather in 'normal' everyday actions like hanging up the washing, lighting cigarettes, engaging in conversation – read it in accordance with the obvious (and seemingly obviously stated) message that the 'normals' are the monsters, and the freaks are normal: "Browning has turned the popular convention of horror topsy-turvy. It is the ordinary, the apparently normal, the beautiful which horrify – the monstrous and distorted which compel our respect, our sympathy, ultimately our affection. The visible beauty conceals the unseen evil, the visible horror is the real goodness."¹⁷ This view would parallel, say, the Dickensian question of 'true gentlemanhood' discussed in *Great Expectations*, or, for that matter, in David Lynch's *The Elephant Man*, which actually quotes Browning's movie. But *Freaks*, I argue, goes much further than that. Not only are *they* like *us* (our self-image), but *we* are like *them* (our image of the other) as well. It is in fact this undecidable oscillation that makes *Freaks*

a truly uncanny work of art. In Robin Wood's view, "horror films . . . are progressive precisely to the degree that they refuse to be satisfied with [the] simple designation of the monster as evil."¹⁸ *Freaks* is progressive precisely in that way. It has often been pointed out that Browning's use of *real* freaks instead of make-up and contortionist-like stunts of 'able-bodied' actors like Chaney made for its uneasy (to say the least) reception. Yet, the "Freak Show," the "dime museum," P.T. Barnum's "American Museum" showing deformed people, had been a continuous presence in the life of 19th-century America.¹⁹ The cinema can in fact be seen as having developed out of the fairground attractions, circuses and sideshows – many of the early cinema people were, like Browning, associated with the fairground. What was truly shocking was not the cast, but the (a-)moral implications of the movie's message.²⁰ Instead of giving a re-assuring categorization of *us* and *them* (as the "Freak Shows" had still done), *Freaks* showed that, somehow, the very distinction between us and them does not hold, since both are two sides of the same coin. Thus, Cleopatra as the chicken woman is the repressed truth of her as the narcissistic "Peacock of the Air," or, in other words, the Peacock is only the dream – or "orthopaedic" (Lacan) armor – of the chicken woman.

The theme of the two seemingly separate realms of freaks and 'big people' is in fact being constantly both re-assured and opened up in the movie. In the beginning of *Freaks*, the barker announces, "You'll laugh at them, shudder at them, and yet, but for the accident of birth, you might be even as they are." Later, when the freaks suspect that Cleopatra is simply misusing Hans' feelings for her, Frances, the armless girl, states "Cleopatra ain't one of us. Why, we're just filthy things to her. She'd spit on Hans if he wasn't giving her presents." One of the climaxes of the movie (and a crucial scene where the two realms are on the verge of collapsing – either as an invitation or a threat, or, both simultaneously) is the wedding banquet scene. Cleopatra has finally married Hans. During the banquet, she openly kisses Hercules. Hans is sitting there, beginning to suspect that he has been taken for a fool. His fault, in the economy of the complex interplay of the fragmented and the whole body, is that he has momentarily given in to the illusion and seduction of wholeness, given in to the (false) promise of being accepted, loved, taken seriously. The freaks begin their ritual of acceptance, passing a large goblet of champagne and finally offering it to Cleopatra, while singing "Gooble, gobble, We accept her, we accept

her, One of us, one of us." This scene is very ambiguous. Though always read as an openly stated peace offer, a ceremony of acceptance, it cannot be denied that there are violent undertones – in the light what's to come, the threat can already be felt, underlined by the fact that the freaks are beating a rhythm to their chant – with knives. After having offended the freaks, shouting "YOU! DIRTY! SLIMY! FREAKS!," Cleopatra almost desperately tries to keep up the separate realms: "You filth! Make me one of you, will you!"

The opening up of the two realms – and in fact their complicity – is most clearly voiced by the characters of what I call the 'middle realm' – most notably Venus and Phroso. After the wedding banquet, after Cleopatra and Hercules have already begun to carry out their plan of slowly poisoning Hans, Venus confronts Hercules and demands that the plot against Hans is revealed, "or I'll tell the coppers." Hercules is furious, "So, you'd tell on your own people." Venus replies "My people are decent circus folks, not dirty rats that would kill a freak to get his money." In a scene between Venus and Phroso, the clown replies to Venus' compliment that he is "a pretty good kid" with the unexplained line "You should have caught me before my operation." Within the Browning universe, such a remark more likely than not refers to a missing limb – in connection with Phroso using it in a flirtatious and sexually charged manner, it might even refer to a missing penis. Thus, Phroso most clearly voices Lacan's contention that in order to gain our entry into society, we have to accept castration – "that pound of flesh which is mortgaged . . . in [the subject's] relationship to the signifier."²¹ The yearning for a phantasmatic wholeness is already based on a loss of a bodily totality, which in itself has never existed except as an illusion. Phroso, then, as well as Venus and Rosco, the stuttering man who is about to marry Daisy, one of the Siamese Twins – they constitute the realm where this complicity of fragmented body and whole body is accepted.

We, the audience, have followed the subject's vicissitudes between the fragmented body and the whole body as well. Our gaze starts with the identification with the intradiegetic audience, then comes to an abrupt stop – the camera starts to descend into the cage where Cleopatra, the chicken woman sits, but then stops short – and is shifted to the perspective of Hans, viewing the "Peacock of the Air" from below. We thus adopt the initial position of the child in Lacan's mirror stage, wishing for and identifying with the illusory wholeness posed

before us. In the end, then, we are placed in the position of the 'big people' again, looking down at the chicken woman from above – a position, however, which by now is revealed as at least precarious.

Like Browning, Diane Arbus, who has been the true heir to Browning's work, saw "that 'monsters' were everywhere, that the whole of modern life could be viewed as a tawdry sideshow, driven by dreams and terrors of alienation, mutilation, actual death and its everyday variations. . . . America, it seemed, was nothing but a monster show."²² Arbus sometimes thought that gazing at the freaks, at these dismembered bodies, "she was reminded of a dark, unnatural hidden self"²³ – precisely the repressed reality of the *fragmented body*. No need to join the Fraternity of the Fragmented, though. We're *always already* members. Tod Browning, I argue, would have agreed.

Notes

¹ A slightly expanded version of this paper appeared under the title "Join the United Mutations: Tod Browning's 'Freaks'" in *Post Script: Essays in Film and the Humanities* 21.3 (Fall 2002): 8-19.

² See Joan Hawkins, "'One of Us': Tod Browning's *Freaks*," *Freakery. Cultural Spectacles of the Body*, ed. R. Garland Thomson (New York: New York UP, 1996) 265-76, and Martin Norden, "Violence, Women and Disability in Tod Browning's *Freaks* and *The Devil Doll*," *The Horror Film Reader*, ed. A. Silver and J. Ursini (New York: Limelight Editions, 2000) 151-65.

³ See Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995).

⁴ Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, trans. J.M. Cohen (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976) 385.

⁵ Qtd. in Jack Stephenson, "Freaks – A Movie Undead". <http://hjem.get2net.dk/jack_stevenson/freaks.htm>

⁶ P. Hardy, T. Milne, and P. Willemsen, *The Encyclopedia of Horror Movies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986) 35.

⁷ Joan Crawford, with Jean Kesner Ardmore, *A Portrait of Joan. The Autobiography of Joan Crawford* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1962) 30.

⁸ Joan Dickey, "A Maker of Mysteries: Tod Browning Is a Specialist in Building Thrills and Chills," *Motion Picture Classic*, April 1928. Qtd. in David Skal and Elias Savada, *Dark Carnival. The Secret World of Tod Browning. Hollywood's Master of the Macabre* (New York: Anchor Books, 1995) 113. Subsequently quoted as (*Dark Carnival*). This book has provided most of the biographical information and reception history referred to in this essay.

⁹ All quotations from the movie are taken from the transcript of the screenplay of *Freaks* – see <<http://dvolpin.teleradiostereo.it/freaks.html>>.

¹⁰ Sigmund Freud, "The Ego and the Id," *On Metapsychology. The Theory of the Unconscious*. The Penguin Freud Library, vol. 11 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984) 339-407, 364. Subsequently quoted as (*The Ego and the Id*).

¹¹ Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. A. Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1977) 1-7. Subsequently quoted as (*Écrits*).

¹² Stephen Farber and Marc Green, *Hollywood on the Couch. A Candid Look at the Overheated Love Affair between Psychiatrists and Moviemakers* (New York: William Morrow & Co., Inc., 1993) 27.

¹³ Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny," *Art and Literature*, ed. A. Dickinson, The Penguin Freud Library, vol. 14 (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1990) 335-76, 366. Subsequently quoted as (*Uncanny*).

¹⁴ For an evaluation of "the Uncanny" as a conceptual tool for the analysis and taxonomy of the "horror movie," see Steven Schneider, "Monsters as Uncanny Metaphors: Freud, Lakoff, and the Representation of Monstrosity in Cinematic Horror," *The Horror Film Reader* 167-91.

¹⁵ Richard Watts, Jr., "A Glance at Tod Browning, an Original of the Cinema," *New York Herald-Tribune* 20 March 1927, sec. 6, 3.

¹⁶ Elliot Stein, "Tod Browning," *Cinema. A Critical Dictionary. The Major Film-Makers. Vol. One: Aldrich to King*. Ed. Richard Roud (London: Secker & Warburg, 1980) 156-66, 157.

¹⁷ Ivan Butler, *Horror in the Cinema* (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1970) 65.

¹⁸ Robin Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* (New York: Columbia UP, 1986) 192.

¹⁹ See Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show. Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and Profit* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1988).

²⁰ On a political level, "*Freaks* is asking a Depression audience to identify not with the Beautiful people . . . but with the sideshow mutations, a total underclass. As a reflection of the time, it's almost revolutionary. But Depression audiences were not prepared for this kind of thing." J. Hobermann and J. Rosenbaum, *Midnight Movies* (New York: Da Capo P, 1983) 307.

²¹ Jacques Lacan, "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*," *Literature and Psychoanalysis. The Question of Reading: Otherwise*, ed. Shoshana Felman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1982) 28.

²² David Skal, *The Monster Show. A Cultural History of Horror* (New York: Norton, 1993) 18.

²³ Patricia Bosworth, *Diane Arbus* (New York: Knopf, 1984) 162.

Contributors

Martina Antretter teaches American literature and culture at the University of Innsbruck. She has given papers on E.E. Cummings, Emily Dickinson and contemporary nature poets at national and international conferences. She prepared the index of *The Emily Dickinson Handbook* (Amherst: U. of Massachusetts Press, 1998), assisted Prof. Gudrun M. Grabher in editing *Emily Dickinson at Home* (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2001) and has a forthcoming publication on obscurity in the poetry of Emily Dickinson in *Labirinti* (Trento: Università degli Studi di Trento, 2002). Her doctoral thesis examines the influence of Emily Dickinson on contemporary American female nature poets.

Astrid M. Fellner is Assistant Professor in the Department of English and American Studies at the University of Vienna. Her publications include *Articulating Selves: Contemporary Chicana Self-Representation* (Braumüller, 2002) and several articles in the fields of U.S. Latino/a literature, Gender Studies, and American Cultural Studies. Currently, she is working on a book about the female body in late-eighteenth-century American literature.

Klaus-Dieter Gross teaches at a Gymnasium in Regensburg, Germany. His scholarly focus is on the interaction of literature, music and painting in American culture. He wrote a Ph.D. thesis on parallels between realist novels and paintings. More recently he has focussed on cross-references between paintings and works of music in the nineteenth century, on American literary opera, and on the pedagogy of intermedia learning.

Klaus D. Heissenberger graduated in American Studies at the University of Vienna, Austria, in the fall of 2001, after having studied in Vienna and Ghent, Belgium. After graduation, he studied in the English graduate program at Bradley University, Peoria, Illinois. He is currently teaching cultural studies as an external lecturer at the Department of English, University of Vienna, and working on a PhD thesis about white masculinities in recent American culture.

Bernd Herzogenrath is the author of *An Art of Desire: Reading Paul Auster* (Rodnopi, 1999), and the editor of *From Virgin Land to Disney World: Nature and Its Discontents in the Americas of Yesterday and Today* (Rodnopi, 2001). His fields of interest are in 19th and 20th Century American Literature, Literary Theory, and Cultural and Media Studies. He has also published articles on Techno and Emily Bronte, David Lynch's *Lost Highway* and Cultural Pathology, Leatherstocking and Belatedness, Kurt Cobain and *The Great Gatsby*, Pynchon and Von Helmholtz, Henry Adams and Chaos Physics, Freud and Thomas Cole. Currently he is working on a project on the Image and Metaphor of the Fragmented Body in American Culture.

Sarah Hildebrandt is a 2001 graduate with a Masters of Arts degree in Popular Culture from Bowling Green State University, in Ohio. Her research interests focus on the body particularly in relation to media and consumer culture, and include such subjects as gender and sexuality, masculinities and various feminist issues. This article represents a segment of her M.A. thesis, which was nominated for the Distinguished Thesis Award at Bowling Green State University. She is currently living in Toronto, Canada.

jan jagodzinski is Professor in the Department of Secondary Education, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada where he teaches visual art education and curricular issues as they relate to postmodern concerns of gender politics, cultural studies and the media (film and television). He is a founding member of the *Journal of Social Theory in Art Education*, the editor of *JSTAE (Journal of Social Theory in Art Education)*, past president of *SIG Media, Culture and Curriculum*, and author of *The Anamorphic I/i* (1996) as well as *Postmodern Dilemmas: Outrageous Essays in Art & Art Education* (1997), and *Pun(k) Deconstruction: Experifigural Writings in Art & Art Education* (1997) and *Pedagogical Desire: Authority, Seduction, Transference and the Question of Ethics* (2002).

Jessica Johnston is a senior lecturer at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand. For the past ten years, she has interviewed the same group of self-described overweight American men and women as they continually attempt to transform their bodies. She has recently published, *Bodies in Context*, a theoretical anthology of body image issues. She is currently working on a critique of feminist theories of the body. She is also investigating the disembodied assumptions inherent in the computer technology and the computer antivirus industry.

Louis J. Kern is Professor of History and the Chair of the Department at Hofstra University. He teaches courses in American Studies, popular culture, film and cultural studies. His scholarly work has focused on the intersection of sexology, sexual behaviour, and gender as they relate to the cultural construction of the body. He is currently working on a study of the cultural history of the eugenics movement in the US from its emergence in the context of free-love radicalism in the mid-nineteenth century through its racialized, socially-reactionary, pseudo-scientific phase during the first half of the twentieth century.

Greta Olson is an assistant professor for American and English literature at Freiburg University in Germany. Her dissertation, "Reading Eating Disorders" will be published during the coming year. She studied philosophy, studio art, and art history at Vassar College and University College London, and philosophy, linguistics and English at Freiburg University. She has published texts on Martin Heidegger, keyholes in eighteenth-century literature and has submitted a text for publication on unreliable narrators. Currently, she is working on a faulty dissertation on how bodies of criminals are presented in exaggerated ways in English literature from the Renaissance to the 20th century.

Anna Schober is an Historian with a Ph.D. from the University of Vienna. Her actual focus of research includes politics of the visual in the 20th century; new social movements; the transformation of public space. At present she is Fellow at the FSP Cultural Studies, Ministry of Science, Austria as well as a lecturer at the Institute of Contemporary History, University of Vienna, at the Technical University, Vienna, Faculty of Architecture, Visual Culture Module and the University of Applied Arts, Vienna. Among her publications are *Blue Jeans. Vom*

Leben in Stoffen und Bildern (Frankfurt/Main and New York: Campus Verlag, 2001) and *Das Inszenierte Geschlecht: Feministische Strategien im Museum* (Vienna, Cologne, Weimar, 1997) together with Hauer, Muttenthaler, Wonisch.

Monika Seidl teaches language and cultural studies classes at the University of Vienna and cultural studies classes at the University of Klagenfurt.

Piotr Zazula, poet, translator, and literary critic, teaches American literature, creative writing and literary translation at the University of Wrocław, where he has been Assistant Professor at the English Department since 1998. In 1993-94, as a Fulbright Visiting Scholar, he conducted postgraduate research in Native American literature and culture at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque, USA. Among his publications are two volumes of poetry: *Sonet dla zakonnic* (Łódź, 1997) and *Lista cudow* (Wrocław, 2000) and translations into Polish of selected poems by Frank O'Hara, Robert Pinsky, James Wright and Louise Glück.

The Editors

Maureen Devine, is a lecturer for American Culture Studies and American Literature at the University of Klagenfurt; Fellow of Salzburg Seminar; A graduate of the University of Texas, (B.S.), Utah State University (M.A.) and University of Klagenfurt Ph.D., her major research and teaching interests include Ecofeminism and Nature Writing, American feminist writing of late 19th and 20th century, as well as Native American and African American writing. Major book publications are *Woman and Nature: Literary Reconceptualizations* Scarecrow Press, 1992, and *Women in Search of Literary Space*. Ed. with Gudrun Grabher, 1991, as well as numerous articles on these and related topics. She regularly lectures and gives papers at international conferences and partner universities.

Michael Draxlbauer is an Associate Professor at the Department of English and American Studies, University of Vienna and a Fellow of the Salzburg Seminar. He has taught courses on American and Canadian Literature, Cultural Studies, Literary Criticism and Essay Writing. His publications include articles on Wallace Stevens, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Transcendentalism, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Sylvia Plath, John Smith und Pocahontas, Robert Penn Warren, George Washington. His special research interests are Puritanism, American Renaissance, Native North American Literatures and he is currently working on a book about the ideological reconstructions of Matoaka ("Pocahontas").

Heinz Tschachler is an Associate Professor of English and American Studies at the University of Klagenfurt, Austria, and the author of *Ökologie und Arkadien* (1990), a study of uses of 'nature' in ideological discourses; *Lewis Mumford's Reception in German Translation and Criticism* (1994); *Prisoners of the Nominal* (1993), an essay on the disciplinary unconscious of inter-national American Studies; and *Ursula K. Le Guin*, a monograph (2001). He has also published essays on cultural studies, cultural criticism, North American fiction, science fiction, utopian literature, and on discursive constructions of national identity. In addition, he is the editor of two books on cultural studies, *Dialog der Texte* (with Franz Kuna), and *Experiencing a Foreign Culture* (with Werner Delanoy and Johann Köberl). Presently, Heinz Tschachler is revising a book-length manuscript tentatively titled *'Fit Allies for the Nazis': Lewis Mumford's Germany and the Rhetoric of American Exceptionalism*.

Studien zur englischen Literatur
herausgegeben von Prof. Dr. Dieter Mehl
(Universität Bonn)

Anne-Julia Zwierlein

Majestic Milton

British Imperial Expansion and
Transformations of *Paradise Lost*,
1667 – 1837

Bd. 13, 2001, 512 S., 65,90 €, gb., ISBN 3-8258-5432-9

Astrid Laupichler

**Lachen und Weinen: tragikomisch-
karnevalistische Entwicklungsräume**

Interpretationen zu Shakespeares

Problemstücken und Romanzen

Bd. 14, 2002, 432 S., 35,90 €, gb., ISBN 3-8258-5824-3

Christa Jansohn (Hg.)

**In the Footsteps of Queen Victoria: Wege
zum Viktorianischen Zeitalter**

Das viktorianische Zeitalter gehört zweifellos zu den interessantesten und gleichzeitig vielschichtigsten Gebieten der englischen Literatur. Der Band versammelt 16 Beiträge, die anlässlich des hundertsten Todesjahres der Königin Victoria im Rahmen einer Ringvorlesung am Centre for British Studies in Bamberg gehalten wurden. Die in deutscher und englischer Sprache verfaßten Beiträge renommierter Forscher und Forscherinnen sollen einen Einblick in die verschiedenen Gebiete des viktorianischen Zeitalters geben.

Der Band ist in folgende Abschnitte unterteilt:

1. Cultural Memories, or Images of Queen Victoria, 2. Science, Society and Victorian Culture, und 3. Reading and Writing in Victorian England. Eine ausführliche Bibliographie rundet den Band ab und soll zur weiteren Beschäftigung mit dem viktorianischen Zeitalter anregen.

Bd. 15, 2003, 352 S., 25,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-5884-7

André Schüller

A Life Composed

T.S. Eliot and the Morals of Modernism

"The modern literary critic", T.S. Eliot wrote in 1929, "must be an 'experimenter' outside of what you might at first consider his own province; [...] there is no literary problem which does not lead us irresistibly to larger problems."

The present study follows Eliot's principle and situates his literary and critical work in a wide context that reveals manifold links between aesthetics, ethics, politics and epistemology: the historical context of early-twentieth-century idealism, vitalism and pragmatism, especially the intensely political Bergsonian controversy, and the modern context of the philosophies of Charles Taylor, Michel Foucault and Richard

Rorty. 'Knowledge', it argues, was verbalised in the modernist age, individualised into the act of 'knowing', an act with motives and goals, and thus introduced into the realm of ethics – a process central to twentieth-century thought. Eliot's poems especially, constructed as "a life composed", a literary lifetime linking composition and composure, ponder the virtue of precision, the sins of pride and "mental sloth", the temptation of prejudice and the need for conviction. Decidedly tentative, Eliot's poems solve the problem of morally significant literature. In a century of suspicion, they ask the crucial question of where one should start to rely.

Bd. 17, 2002, 368 S., 24,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-6362-x

"Human Potentialities"

Studien zu Aldous Huxley & zeitgenössischer
Kultur

Studies in Aldous Huxley & Contemporary Culture

herausgegeben von / edited by

Prof. Dr. Bernfried Nügel (Universität Münster)
und Prof. Dr. Lothar Fietz (Universität Tübingen)

Gerhard Wagner

The 'Beauty-Truths' of Literature

Elemente einer Dichtungstheorie in Aldous
Huxleys Essayistik

Aldous Huxley hat zwar keine systematische Literaturästhetik verfaßt, doch spielen dichtungstheoretische Fragestellungen in seinem umfangreichen essayistischen Werk eine ausgesprochen wichtige Rolle. Seine Überlegungen zum Sinn und Zweck sowie zu den Grenzen und Möglichkeiten der Literatur sind fester Bestandteil seines philosophischen Denkens und geprägt von seiner Auffassung der besonderen Erfahrungs- und Ausdrucksfähigkeiten des wahren Dichters. Für ihn ist höhere Dichtung Träger von Erkenntnis, nämlich in Form von "beauty-truths".

Die vorliegende Studie analysiert und systematisiert Huxleys literartheoretische Vorstellungen und gelangt dabei zu einem heuristischen Denkmodell, das weit ausführlicher und kohärenter ist, als bislang angenommen wurde. Idealziel der Dichtung ist demnach ein Gesamtentwurf, der die unmittelbar-gefühlsmäßige Erlebenswelt des Menschen wie auch sein rational-wissenschaftliches Denken und darüber hinaus die Welt des aus menschlicher Perspektive Nebensächlichen und Unbedeutenden erfaßt. Indem die Untersuchung Huxleys graduelle Wendung von einer betont skeptischen hin zu einer mystischen Welterkenntnis berücksichtigt, gibt sie außerdem Aufschluß über Konstanten und Entwicklungen seines dichtungstheoretischen Denkens.

Bd. 3, 2001, 280 S., 30,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-5358-6

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Evelyn Firchow; Bernfried Nügel (eds)
Reluctant Modernists: Aldous Huxley and Some Contemporaries
 A Collection of Essays by Peter Edgerly Firchow. With an Introduction by Jerome Meckier and a Personal Memoir by Janice Rossen. Presented on the Occasion of his 65th Birthday December 16, 2002

The essays collected here deal with modernist writers who, on the whole, felt 'reluctant' about their modernist status because they believed that it was just as important to look backward as it was to look forward. Indeed, for most of them looking backward was more important because it was only through the past that one could understand one's proper place in the present and in the future. That is why in Huxley's *Brave New World* it is the rejection of the past in the future – and by implication in the present – that makes its satire so penetrating. Modernism, in other words, means for these writers not a radical break with the past but a continuing search for what still connects them (and us) vitally with it.

Bd. 4, 2003, 352 S., 30,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-5962-2

Aldous Huxley Annual

A Journal of Twentieth-Century Thought and Beyond

Jerome Meckier; Bernfried Nügel (eds.)
Volume 1 (2001)

Aldous Huxley Annual is the official organ of the Aldous Huxley Society at the Centre for Aldous Huxley Studies in Münster, Germany (see AHS homepage on the Internet via <www.anglistik.uni-muenster.de/Huxley>). It publishes essays on the life, times, and interests of Aldous Huxley and his circle. It aspires to be the sort of periodical that Huxley would have wanted to read and to which he might have contributed.

2001, 300 S., 34,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-4370-x

Jerome Meckier; Bernfried Nügel (eds.)
Volume 2 (2003)

Aldous Huxley Annual is the official organ of the Aldous Huxley Society at the Centre for Aldous Huxley Studies in Münster, Germany (see AHS homepage on the Internet via <www.anglistik.uni-muenster.de/Huxley>). It publishes essays on the life, times, and interests of Aldous Huxley and his circle. It aspires to be the sort of periodical that Huxley would have wanted to read and to which he might have contributed.

Volume 3 will feature Huxley's typescript for *Brave New World: A Musical Comedy*
 N.B.: The submission deadline for volume 3 of Aldous Huxley Annual is 15 April 2003. For further

details see inside front cover.

2003, 256 S., 34,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-6280-1

Jerome Meckier; Bernfried Nügel (eds.)
Volume 3 (2003)

Bd. 3, Herbst 2003, ca. 240 S., ca. 34,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-7137-1

Hallenser Studien zur Anglistik und Amerikanistik

hrsg. am Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik
 (Universität Halle-Wittenberg)

Angela Kuhh

Vielstimmige Welt

Die Werke St. John de Crèvecoeurs in deutscher Sprache

"Das Werk hat unter den Händen des Deutschen Übersetzers noch gewonnen." Die europaweite Begeisterung für die Werke Crèvecoeurs äußerte sich auch in einer Flut an deutschen Übersetzungen: Zwischen 1782 und 1802 entstanden mehr als 30 Schriften, die auf die Zeilen des berühmten "Amerikanischen Landmanns" zurückgingen. Erstmals erfolgt hier eine bibliographische Erfassung und eine chronologische Vorstellung dieser Texte wie auch der Rezeptionsdokumente.

Ausführliche Übersetzungsanalysen zu den Themen Indianer, Quäker, Sklaverei, deutsche Einwanderer, Walfang, Flora und Fauna liefern neue Beiträge zum deutschen Amerikabild im ausgehenden 18. Jahrhundert und erlauben einen detaillierten Einblick in die vielstimmige Welt Crèvecoeurs.

Bd. 8, 2001, 480 S., 25,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-4882-5

Wolf Kindermann;

Gisela Hermann-Brennecke (eds.)

Echoes in a Mirror: The English Institute after 125 Years

This volume is published in honor of the 125th anniversary of the English Institute at the Martin-Luther University in Halle-Wittenberg, one of the earliest of its kind in Germany. Its long tradition of research in historical linguistics had a considerable impact on literary, cultural and educational studies. Many of the scholars who taught and researched here over the past 125 years tried to uphold academic standards, scholarly values, and personal integrity even in turbulent times of ideological pressure and political turmoil.

Even now, 12 years after the wall came down, the process of restructuring that it triggered has not come to an end. In spite of this, faculty and staff are standing their ground by linking up with the legacy handed down to them.

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This volume presents current research at the Institute in a collection of essays on *Beowulf*, "Elizabethan Parliaments", "Black Vernacular English", "Denotational Incongruencies", "Newspaper English", "Interrogating Whiteness", Edgar Allan Poe, Charlotte Lennox, T. S. Eliot, Salman Rushdie, David Lodge, and on empirical issues related to foreign language acquisition research and to teacher training programs.
Bd. 9, 2001, 264 S., 20,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-5675-5

Andreas Marschollek

Kognitive und affektive Flexibilität durch fremde Sprachen

Eine empirische Untersuchung in der Primarstufe

Inwieweit Kinder Fremdem offen begegnen und ihre Persönlichkeit weiter entwickeln, hängt wesentlich von ihrem Zugang zu fremden Sprachen ab. Der vorliegende Band untersucht – theoretisch und empirisch – den Beitrag, den ein Unterricht mit fremden Sprachen in der Primarstufe dazu leisten kann.

Die Ergebnisse legen es nahe, Schülerinnen und Schüler immer wieder gezielt an eine bewusste Auseinandersetzung mit Sprache(n), Identität und Einstellungen heranzuführen.

Ein entsprechendes vom Autor entwickeltes und in der Praxis erprobtes Unterrichtskonzept wird vorgestellt und kritisch analysiert.

Bd. 10, 2002, 320 S., 24,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-6262-3

Erlanger Studien zur Anglistik und Amerikanistik

herausgegeben von Rudolf Freiburg und Dieter Meindl

Dieter Meindl

North American Encounters

Essays in U.S. and English and French Canadian Literature and Culture

These essays (in English except for four items in German and French) provide an intercultural perspective. They deal with such diverse aspects of North American (including Québecois) literature as "Kanadas Verhältnis zu den USA im Spiegel seiner Literatur," "Canada and American Slavery", the Acadian theme in "Longfellow et Antonine Maillet" and "The Western Love Code: Faulkner, Hébert, Hemingway, and Ondaatje." The continental context also pervades treatments of novels (featuring Indian wars, sentimentalism, the West, and modern *picares*), story cycles (e.g., Atwood's), and the long poem (Kroetsch).

Bd. 3, 2002, 184 S., 19,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-6110-4

work – science – medium

american studies

herausgegeben von Hanjo Berressem
(Universität zu Köln)

Philipp Hofmann (ed.)

chaos/control:complexity

chaos theory & cultural production. hypertext
by Philipp Hofmann, essay by Hanjo Berressem

Bd. 1, 2002, 80 S., 30,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-6096-5

Anglophone

Literaturen / Anglophone Literatures

Hamburger Beiträge zur Erforschung neuerer
englischsprachiger Literaturen

Hamburg Studies in the New Literatures in
English

Herausgeber/General Editors: Gerd Dose und Bettina
Keil

Henrike Wenzel

Geschichte erzählen

Untersuchungen zur Behandlung von Geschichte und nationaler Identität in australischer Gegenwartsliteratur

Australiens Suche nach einer eigenen Identität ist mit dem Ende des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts keineswegs zum Stillstand gekommen, sondern hat vielmehr eine Neubelebung erfahren, die ganz zentral mit einer Hinwendung zur eigenen Geschichte zusammenhängt. Welche Rolle die Literatur der jüngeren Zeit in diesem Prozess spielt, inwiefern und auf welche Weise die Autoren der Gegenwart auf historische Aspekte rekurrieren, wird in dieser Untersuchung mit Blick auf repräsentative Werke der australischen Gegenwartsliteratur beantwortet werden.

Bd. 4, 2003, 112 S., 17,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-6720-x

FORECAAST

(Forum for European Contributions
to African American Studies)

Mar Gallego

Passing Novels in the Harlem Renaissance **Identity Politics and Textual Strategies**

Passing Novels in the Harlem Renaissance offers an insightful study of the significance of passing novels for the literary and intellectual debate of the Harlem Renaissance. Mar Gallego effectively uncovers the presence of a subversive component in five of these novels (by James Weldon Johnson,

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George Schuyler, Nella Larsen, and Jessie Fauset), turning them into useful tools to explore the passing phenomenon in all its richness and complexity. Her compelling study intends to contribute to the ongoing revision of the parameters conventionally employed to analyze passing novels by drawing attention to a great variety of textual strategies such as double consciousness, parody, and multiple generic covers. Examining the hybrid nature of these texts, Gallego skillfully highlights their radical critique of the status quo and their celebration of a distinct African American identity.

"Passing Novels in the Harlem Renaissance is an impressive work of scholarship and interpretation. It is well researched and stimulating to read."

Hanna Wallinger, University of Salzburg

"Mar Gallego draws our renewed attention to the uses and subversions of the trope of passing that have characterized the African American novelistic tradition also in the twentieth century." Giulia Fabi, University of Ferrara

"Mar Gallego's thorough scholarship now provides us with a new, in-depth and refreshing reading of texts we thought we already knew something about. A provocative text and a welcome addition to the field!" Justine Tally, University of La Laguna

Bd. 8, 2003, 224 S., 24,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-5842-1

Paola Boi; Sabine Broeck (Eds.)

CrossRoutes – The Meanings of "Race" for the 21st Century

This collection reflects the still urgent project of historical recuperation, as well as an examination of literary representations and other cultural manifestations of the Black Diaspora. Disciplinary work within the boundaries of African American Studies has been enhanced by more general considerations of the history of race and racism in globalized contexts. The articles assembled here reflect recent empirical research as well as challenging theoretical considerations. Contributions address particular formations of racialized modernity owed to the impact of the Atlantic slave trade and slavery, and thus broaden the approach to the Middle Passage, to improve our understanding of it as a constitutive transatlantic phenomenon in the widest possible sense.

Bd. 9, 2003, 272 S., 25,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-6651-3

Sylvia Mayer (ed.)

Restoring the Connection to the Natural World

Essays on the African American Environmental Imagination

Since its emergence in the second half of the

nineteenth century American environmentalism had predominantly been a white, middle-class pursuit, preoccupied with notions of wilderness and wildlife preservation. Only fairly recently, with the advent of the environmental justice movement in the 1980s, has American environmentalism broadened its definition of "environment" to include the concerns relevant to a community's way of living. Especially the concerns of poor urban communities of color, which have been exposed to environmental hazards disproportionately, have entered the political agenda. This volume - one of the first collections of ecocritical essays devoted exclusively to African American texts - shows that African Americans have contributed to the efforts of the environmental justice movement not only as political activists, but also as writers. The essays range from studies of nineteenth-century slave narratives to twentieth-century texts by Zora Neale Hurston, Claude McKay, Richard Wright, Charles Johnson, Toni Cade Bambara, Audre Lorde, and Octavia Butler. Employing a variety of theoretical and methodological premises, they provide insight into the texts' various conceptualizations of "nature," "culture," and "humanness" and their implications for environmental ethics.

Bd. 10, 2003, 208 S., 20,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-6732-3

Kimberley Phillips; Hermine Pinson;

Lorenzo Thomas; Hanna Wallinger (eds.)

Critical Voicings of Black Liberation Resistance and Representations in the Americas

The contributions to "Critical Voices of Black Liberation in the Americas" originated from the 1999 CAAR Conference in Münster and from conferences held in the US in 2000 and 2001. More than half of the eleven essays consider black performances on stage, in sound, and on film; the remaining essays explore slavery, African American literature, and nineteenth-century black educators. These exciting essays creatively examine artistic and/or political articulation of black liberation as the construction of a new critical and signifying voice. This liberated and critical voice asserts itself as much as a communal expression of black subjectivities as it is an articulation of the black self.

Bd. 11, 2003, 192 S., 20,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-6739-0

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Contributions to Asian American Literary Studies

edited by Rocío G. Davis (University of Navarra)
and Sāmi Ludwig (University of Bern)

Rocío G. Davis; Sāmi Ludwig (Eds.)

Asian American Literature in the International Context

Readings on Fiction, Poetry, and Performance

In their different and yet complementary perspectives, all of the essays in *Asian American Literature in the International Context: Readings on Fiction, Poetry, and Performance* reiterate the universal lesson of pluralism. They are divided into sections that deal with biraciality and biculturalism, interethnic negotiations, poetic creations, narrative experiments, and (re)constructing self. The wide variety of approaches reflects the contributors' training in different cultures and across cultures. It showcases refreshing new perspectives in reading that combine the views of literary scholars from three different continents. This collection creates a space for discussion and commentary, of heightened appreciation and increased creativity, a forum that turns the discipline of Asian American Studies into a truly intercultural debate.

Bd. 1, 2002, 272 S., 25,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-5710-7

Anglistik / Amerikanistik

Ulrike Ernst

From Anti-Apartheid to African Renaissance

Interviews with South African Writers and
Critics on Cultural Politics Beyond the Cul-
tural Struggle

The focus of this collection is the cultural and literary policy of the tripartite alliance (ANC, SACP, COSATU) after its denouncement of 'culture as a weapon'. Three shifts are noted between 1990–2000: the end of apartheid, the alliance's accession to power, and the change of presidency from Nelson Mandela to Thabo Mbeki, including the adoption of a neo-liberal macro-economic policy.

The investigation stresses the importance of the role of writers and intellectuals in political and societal transformation processes that have a tendency to destroy the agency that initially set them in motion. Startling revelations are being made, which highlight the emptiness of much Rainbow Nation sloganeering.

Bd. 7, 2002, 208 S., 20,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-5804-9

Andreas Lienkamp; Wolfgang Werth;
Christian Berkemeier (Hg.)

"As strange as the world"

Annäherungen an das Werk des Erzählers und
Filmemachers Paul Auster

Paul Auster ist nicht nur einer der populärsten, sondern auch der interessantesten Autoren der amerikanischen Gegenwartsliteratur. Seine Bücher und Filme sind der gelungene Beweis, dass man auch im Zeitalter der Postmoderne spannend, unterhaltsam und dabei doch literarisch anspruchsvoll erzählen kann.

Ohne Scheuklappen verbindet Auster Leichtigkeit und Tiefgang, eingängiges Fabulieren und erzähltechnische Finesse. Seine Romane und Kurzgeschichten lassen sich als packende Detektivgeschichten, aber auch als metaphysische Spekulationen über Zufall, Schein und Identität lesen.

Keineswegs erschöpfend angelegt, mag dieser Band Anregungen für die Auseinandersetzung mit dem Werk eines zeitgenössischen Erzählers und Filmemachers bieten.

Bd. 8, 2002, 170 S., 20,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-6046-9

Victor Grove

Hamlet

Das Drama des modernen Menschen

Hamlet, das Drama ist nicht leicht zu lesen. Dies war Motivation für den Autor, mit der vorliegenden Abhandlung den Weg zu bahnen, damit dieses monumentale Werk zahlreichen Menschen zugänglich wird. Einige hundert Jahre zurückliegend, wird Shakespeares *Hamlet* unter seiner Hand zu einem aktuellen Werk.

Das Buch schrieb Dr. Victor Grove nach zahlreichen Vorträgen, die er an Universitäten und Hochschulen, für amerikanische und britische Truppen sowie für deutsche Kriegsgefangene gehalten hatte. Heute, 50 Jahre später, in einer zunehmend von Skepsis und Lähmung belasteten Welt – vor allem nach dem „11. September 2001“ –, ist *Das Drama des modernen Menschen* aktueller denn je.

Bd. 10, 2003, 248 S., 30,90 €, br., ISBN 3-8258-6224-0

Birgit Lahaye

Pirating History

Die Darstellung des haitianischen
Unabhängigkeitskampfes in der
Erzählliteratur


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A stylized graphic of the American flag, featuring red and white stripes and a blue field with white stars, is positioned at the top and bottom of the page.

American culture has literally become fixated on the body at the same time that the body has emerged as a key term within critical and cultural theory. Contributions thus address the body as a site of the cultural construction of various identities, which are themselves enacted, negotiated, or subverted through bodily practices. Contributions come from literary and cultural studies, film and media studies, history and sociology, and women studies, and are representative of many theoretical positions, hermeneutic, historical, structuralist, feminist, postmodernist. They deal with representations and discursifications of the body in a broad array of texts, in literature, the visual arts, theater, the performing arts, film and mass media, science and technology, as well as in various cultural practices.

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